JAMES THURBER WILLIAM SANSOM
JOHN COLLIER

ARGOSY

JANUARY, 1953
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A
Tale of Heroes
BY
JOHN
STEINBECK

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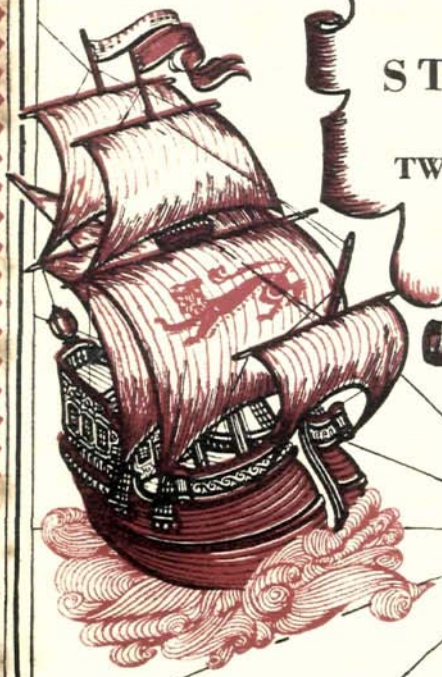
STORIES



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ARGOSY

Contents for January, 1953

Vol. XIV **No. 1**

		Page
Sheepheards Song		4
Chaise and Pair	**Clive Burnley**	5
Star in the East	**E. Macwhirter**	15
Wedded Bliss		20
Compiled by C. Kent Wright		
Over Insurance	**John Collier**	21
Nowell		26
"Song of Angels," from "October and other Poems," by Robert Bridges, by permission of The Clarendon Press, Oxford		
Afterglow	**John Steinbeck**	29
From "East of Eden," by courtesy of William Heinemann		
Boys Will Be Boys		48
Tit For Tat	**Robert Fontaine**	49
Light Reading	**Violet Trefusis**	52
By permission of Hutchinson and Company		
Maneater	**Alastair Scobie**	53
Invitation		60
Token of Love	**Michael Foster**	63
When I Was a Lad	**John Masefield**	74
By courtesy of Dr. John Masefield, O.M., The Society of Authors and William Heinemann		
Lady of Sweet Desire	**Powys Mathers**	75
From "The Thousand Nights and One Night," translated from the French of J. C. Mardrus, by permission of Routledge and Kegan Paul		
Off With His Head	**Richard Gordon**	79
And So To Bed		88
"Up in the Morning . . ." by courtesy of Hutchinson and Company; "Behind the News," from "Beds," by permission of André Deutsch; "Sweeter than Honey," by courtesy of William Collins, Sons and Company		
The Smile	**William Sansom**	91
From "A Touch Of The Sun," by permission of The Hogarth Press		
Brothers of Ajaccio	**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**	97
Tree of Fable	**C. Day Lewis**	115
From "Poems 1943-1947," by courtesy of Faber and Faber		
The Thirteen Clocks	**James Thurber**	116
By permission of Hamish Hamilton		
Argosy Crossword		144

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Sheepheards Song

LOE how the firmament,
Within an azure fold,
The flock of starres hath pent,
That we might them behold.
Yet from their beames proceedeth not this light,
Nor can their Christalls such reflections give :
What then dooth make the Element so bright ?
The heavens are come downe upon earth to live.
But harken to the Song,
Glorie to glories King :
And peace all men among,
These Choristers doo sing.
Angels they are, as also, Sheepheards, hee,
Whom in our feare we doo admire to see.

Let not amazement blinde
Your soules, said he, annoy :
To you and all mankinde,
My message bringeth joy.
For loe the worlds great Sheepheard now is borne
A blessed Babe, an Infant full of power :
After long night, uprisen in the morne,
Renowning Bethlem in the Saviour.
Sprung is the perfect day,
By Prophets seene a farre :
Sprung is the mirthfull May,
Which winter cannot marre.
In Davids *Cittie dooth this Sunne appeare :*
Clouded in flesh, yet Sheepheards sit we heere.

E.B., *from an Elizabethan MS.*

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CHAISE AND PAIR

"Damnation!" exclaimed Lord Braxo. "They'll be over the Border by nightfall"

by CLIVE BURNLEY

"I HAVE a very good mind, ma'am," said Edward Cuester, fifth Lord Braxo of Hopescott and Ross, to the woman who was sharing the post-chaise in which he was being driven across a bleak Pennine fell, "I have a very good mind to insist that you leave this vehicle immediately."

"That is no more than I would have expected, sir," answered Miss Louisa Martin, "from a member of *your* family. But," she added with dignity, "I defy you, sir!"

This was very extraordinary conduct. Ladies did not defy the fifth Lord Braxo, even at fifty-three, nor was he as a rule ungallant to them, even those who, like Miss Martin, would never see forty again. His manners were generally irreproachable and those whom his rank failed to impress did not usually ignore his straight-backed military bearing, his proud patrician nose, or the imperious glint of his eye; nor, in normal circumstances, did Miss Louisa's unruffled poise draw anything but courtesy from the most boorish of men.

But what usually accounts for extraordinary conduct accounted for it now—extraordinary circumstances.

An hour earlier, at the Falcon Inn, now seven miles back down the puddle-strung road, Lord Braxo, with that assurance which sat so well upon him, had demanded a post-chaise and four, at once: a sovereign to the postilions if it were ready in ten minutes and two if it were ready in five.

But at the very same moment Miss Louisa, with that serene dignity which accorded so well with her manner of tranquil command, had also demanded a chaise and four, instantly, for an errand of life and death, at a bonus of three guineas payable at the next stage, and on promise of her eternal gratitude to the post-boys.

"But damme," said the landlord, "there's nobbut a single pair of 'osses in place!"

That was the situation—two impatient travellers, each demanding a chaise and two pairs of horses, having both dismounted from

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vehicles that could plainly be taken no farther by the foam-flecked animals which had brought them thither—and only a single pair of rather sorry nags in the whole range of stables!

In the end, but only after much argument, reason prevailed. Both travellers were bound in the same direction; neither would admit that the errand of the other could possibly be more urgent than his or her own, and finally they shared a chaise. The single postilion bestrode his horse, and off they went northward at as good a pace as the waterlogged road and the indifferent animals permitted.

But this was not pace enough to satisfy either of them.

Every furlong Lord Braxo promised larger rewards to the man on the horse, if only he would wring another mile an hour out of the spavined pair; as regularly Miss Martin offered rather less cash but considerably more drama, hinting at the sensational issues which depended upon speed: so that the poor post-boy, between tears and covetousness, would have sent the little carriage over Lancashire as fast as one of those new-fangled steam railway engines, if it had been humanly possible. But it wasn't.

"Cursed misfortune!" Lord Braxo muttered to himself. "They'll be fifteen miles ahead of me by now. Damnation—they'll be over the Border by nightfall!"

"Ah!" said Miss Martin. "So we appear to be on a similar errand. I also am trying to prevent someone from crossing the Border."

"What!" replied his lordship. "Another scapegrace pair away to their ruin at Gretna, eh? . . . You don't surprise me, ma'am. This road's thick with 'em, young fools and trollops, old fools and kitchen-maids, heiresses and pantry-boys. Why, it's an industry, ma'am. It's the thing the Border's lived on ever since they stopped reiving cattle. And to think these lazy scoundrels have to join forces with some chit of a country slut to drag my boy to ruin!"

He ground his teeth.

"The case that concerns me," explained Miss Martin, "is somewhat different. I fear my niece has been deluded by a plausible young wastrel, sir, who uses his position to dazzle and deceive honest young women. And such is the folly of our society," she said, "that even such a young blackguard as this can clap an 'honourable' to his name."

"Eh?" cried Lord Braxo. "An 'honourable'? Honourable who?"

"The Honourable John Cuester," said Louisa, with contempt. "And that," she added, "is a contradiction. He is nothing more than a reckless spendthrift deceiver; a young libertine, I have no doubt. It's in his family. Why, they say his father—"

"Madam," thundered Lord Braxo, sitting bolt upright and

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fixing her with that glance that paralyzed menials and foot soldiers. "I *am* his father."

"In that case," said Miss Martin coolly, and with some scorn, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"And I suppose your niece, ma'am," said his lordship sternly, "is that penniless and designing minx who has entrapped and deluded my poor boy?"

"My niece, sir, is that innocent and guileless creature who has been so wickedly abducted by your licentious son. And penniless indeed! She has three hundred pounds a year of her own!"

"And by gad, ma'am, if they beat us to Gretna Hall, she'll need every penny of it," declared Lord Braxo warmly. "They shall never have a farthing from me, my oath they won't. I demand to know, ma'am, why parental control in your family has ever permitted such a thing as this to happen at all—if indeed it was not a plot engineered by the whole clan of Martins."

"I ignore your insults, sir," said Miss Martin, "which are no more than I would have expected from your family. As to parental control, my dear niece has long been an orphan and I have myself been responsible for her upbringing. She was in all respects a model child until she met one whose breeding had been so sadly neglected that he was lost to every decent and refined instinct. I refer," explained Miss Martin, "to your son, the extremely dishonourable Mr. Cuester."

It was at this point that Lord Braxo threatened to eject Miss Martin, in the middle of that soggy wilderness, and that Miss Martin, in reply, defied him.

She sat there defying him silently and quite serenely for several more miles, while her companion raved at the poor postilion until, at last, disaster heaped upon disaster bludgeoned even such a man as he into gloomy silence.

In the first place the tiny droplets of water that made up the pervading wet mist grew steadily bigger and more vigorous. The mist became a fine drizzle, the fine drizzle a gentle shower, the gentle shower a steady downpour, the steady downpour a drenching torrent driven into their faces at thirty degrees by a bitter wind. In the second place the nearside horse went lame. In the third place the postilion, alarmed by the motion of the vehicle, after examining it carefully, declared that the linchpin was likely to break at any moment and it was very probable that at the next pot-hole the chaise would fall in half. Fourthly and lastly, the Queen's Head, the next hostelry likely to be able to assist them, was eleven miles distant.

But the human frame, like well-built chaises, can, on occasion, take a great deal of abuse, and both passengers were still living when,

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on the night side of dusk, they were driven at a creaking walking pace up to the radiant door of the Queen's Head. The human spirit, as is also well known, is unconquerable; as soon as some first aid measures had been carried out both passengers announced to the landlord their intention of continuing their journey northward that night and very nearly that instant, in spite of weather, darkness and whatever might, by now, have been their infirmities.

This astonishing request, for some reason, made the landlord smile in a benevolently crafty manner.

"By your leave, 'tasn't possible, sir," he said, "on account of a fine young couple as went through six hour since, and bought up every post-shay in the yeard, and took 'em all out in a percession a quarter mile long. 'Tis an old dodge, that 'ere, and a tidy dear one, to keep off per-soot, d'ye see, sir. But 'tis powerful hard on others as may want to go the same way. Aye, 'twas lucky for me no young lord tried that trick the day I took my Bessie to Coldstream"—he sighed—"for mine was a Scottish wedding, too."

"Well, my friend," said Lord Braxo, in a menacing tone, "your funeral's likely to be an English one, unless you find me a vehicle. I'm not a man to be baulked, I tell you flatly."

"Now, now, sir," protested the landlord. "Can't you let 'em best you, in the name o' charity, just this once? 'Tis a wicked thing to deny young love, sir, and ten to one they're over Solway by this time, and the thing done, in any case."

Lord Braxo shot a quick and cautionary glance at Miss Martin, one full of meaning, an admonition silently expressed; a conspirator's glance. Then looking the landlord fairly but not too full in the face, to suggest a natural diffidence, he assumed an expression indicating a sort of jovial cunning, and said:

"Your sentiments do you credit, landlord. But I perceive you don't understand me. Now, if that fine young couple who took the chaises had known that by so doing they were destroying the hopes of a pair as loving (I swear) if not quite so young—wouldn't they have left us at least an ostler's gig to travel in? Eh?"

"Why, bust me," said the landlord, "you don't mean to say—"

"I certainly do," answered Lord Braxo, allowing a note of earnest tenderness to creep into his voice. "Love does not count the years, my friend. And will you dare to deny to my dearest Mellicent and me the joy we have planned, will you allow us to be overtaken here by her fiendish relatives—who stop at nothing? All for the sake of two paltry pieces of horse-flesh?"

"Why, lord love you," answered the landlord, "why didn't you say afore? 'Tasn't often we get any but young blades on that sort o' business, though I do recollect once there was a passon nigh on seventy a-running away with 'is servant-girl—oh, not as I

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reckons you'll be any more than in the prime of life, sir," he added hastily. " But, bust me, I thought you was on the other side o' the wall completely. Bide there," he said, " afore that fire, and steam a bit, and I'll go see what it's likely I can do."

When he had gone Miss Martin eyed Lord Braxo coldly.

" A very successful stratagem, sir," she said, " but one in which I should never have stooped to take part, had the circumstances been any less vital. Also my name happens to be Louisa, not Mellicent."

Lord Braxo seemed very pleased with himself, and now leant across and ogled her outrageously.

" To me, dear madam," he said, " you will always remain the Mellicent of my tenderest dreams ! "

" If I thought I were ever likely to have a place in any dreams of yours," she said, " I trust they would be nightmares."

" I am too much a gentleman to take advantage of that remark," he said, " and I am hurt. My dear woman, there are few more eligible widowers in the land than this humble suitor of yours ; women pursue me, my oath upon it."

" Ten minutes, sir," said the landlord, popping his head into the room. " Ye'd best take plenty o' brandy. It's a wild night."

It was. But the landlord had done them proud, at considerable expense to them both, although, such was his benevolence, at not such profit to himself as he might have reaped from keeping them that night under his roof ; it was a chaise and four that waited for them, its lamplight glittering in long yellow lines over the streaming road. As it chanced, his generosity was to be rewarded.

They set out at a royal pace and the postilions who, like the passengers, had prepared themselves for the perils of the night with brandy, needed no urging. Away flew the little equipage, its wheels grinding and splashing through the mud and mirk. Up invisible hills and down dark dales they plunged, at such a pace that they could not stop before they were up to their axles in roaring water.

It was as well they stopped then, for ahead of them in the dim glow of the lamps they could only see what appeared to be a vast flood, surging over the road with muddy whirlpools and gleaming snag-rips, roaring away into the blackness. Around their wheels the waters hissed and thundered ; the vehicle pulsed with their impact, and seemed every moment about to break into fragments. Danger was so real that no orders were given, there were no remonstrances and no disagreements ; round they came as sharply as fear could drive them, and a little later were heading rather more soberly back to the Queen's Head.

The landlord was pleased to see them and happy to be able to tell them that he had had news that the streams were up south of the

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inn, too; which meant they were safe from pursuit. Unfortunately so many benighted travellers had come to the inn that the house was full, with the exception of one very small bed in a very small room. With the utmost coyness and circumlocution he contrived to suggest that in the circumstances they could perhaps . . .

"How dare you, fellow?" roared Lord Braxo. "Have you no idea how a man of honour lives? Nay, sir, for a little longer we must remain parted. My dearest Mellicent shall have the bed. As for myself, I shall do well enough by your kitchen fire."

Miss Martin, surprised that he had not made the occasion an opportunity for dubious badinage, thanked him quite sincerely.

"'Tis *nothing*," he said, "*nothing* whatever."

And with that he fell flat on his face.

When he was lifted he appeared to be unconscious. His breathing was violent and peculiar and his face purple. He writhed and groaned, plainly in paroxysms of pain.

He was put on to a settee, and while the landlord ran for help Miss Martin undid his tightest clothing and smoothed his brow, which felt as cold and clammy as death itself, as brows are apt to do after exposure to severe mountain rainstorms. By this time the landlord had returned with the information that there was no doctor this side of the floods but that the very grave and heavily pimpled young man accompanying him, a chance guest at the hotel, was very nearly one, being in fact a medical student on the very brink of qualifying. Lord Braxo was now conscious. That is to say his eyes were open, being directed at Miss Martin's with an expression of frightened anxiety that would have wrung a far stonier heart.

With a funereal gravity, the pimply young man felt his pulse. Before he had time to make his diagnosis the suffering man, in a tremulous whisper utterly unlike his normal full-lunged voice, managed to speak.

"'Tis the thing—the thing my father died of," he gasped. "'Tis the terrible Chinese palsy of the heart. I know it!"

In due course the pimply young man to some extent confirmed his fears. A grave condition of the cardiac organ, he said, brought to a crisis by exposure and travel; five days' rest in a darkened room (he explained to Miss Martin) might possibly enable the patient to recover sufficiently to be taken to his home, if he were given ducks' eggs beaten up in hot brandy every three hours. But even then, said the pimply young man, it would be touch and go; probably go, he added, shaking his head.

Miss Louisa's eyes filled with tears. Not that she had any particular regard for this man—how could she have?—but such a very short time ago he had been so blatantly vigorous and alive, so

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dominant and sure of his destiny, and here he was, a pitiful wreck, almost certainly doomed.

These disclosures moved the landlord to great exertions. He was already aware of his guest's rank and had earlier debated the wisdom of turning out the attorney in the Lion room to make way for him. But he had a strong conception of justice and had decided not to eject one hale lawyer for the sake of one hale peer. Now, however, with the aristocrat at death's door, the position was altered—

Some hours later Lord Braxo was lying in the best bed in the best room in the house in an apparently comatose condition, digesting his last brandy and duck's egg, and calling feebly from time to time for water, at which Miss Martin, sitting over a shaded candle at the other end of the room, would instantly bring him a drink and smooth his brow, murmuring softly, " There, there—it's all right, quite all right," and adjust the covers and stay until the poor man appeared to relapse again into his uneasy slumbers. But there finally came a time when his feeble summons was neglected ; warmth and fatigue had become too much for Miss Louisa, who drooped as she sat over her candle.

At which the peer sat upright in his bed, upright and indignant, and bellowed in a voice that shook the hangings, " Don't you hear me, woman ? Water, I say ! "

And then, as the poor lady leapt in terror to her feet, only half aware of what he had said but certain that the last dreadful delirium had set in, Lord Braxo lay back on his pillow and laughed until he cried and a crippling stitch set in along his lower ribs. This ended his laughter, but he was still bubbling and gurgling with merriment as he calmly stepped out of bed, lightly clad as he was, and wrapped a blanket round his shoulders.

" I didn't mean to recover until the morning," he said, wiping his eyes, " but damme, I haven't the heart, even for the aunt of a niece like yours. 'Tis the way nurses are paid, my dear—with gratitude. And you should be grateful to me, my sweet Mellicent, for here's the best bed in the house (such as it is) and but for me you'd be sleeping in a servant's truckle-bed. Oh, it was easy enough —I used to do it in my school-days—a matter of holding the breath and wriggling. But I've had my watch and now it's your turn. I'll take the chair and you can throw off your damp gown and help yourself to a few hours of honest sleep."

" Sir," answered Miss Martin, " you are plainly a man of the vilest duplicity. You care not what anxiety and suffering your deceptions may cause to others. Do you for a moment suppose I could allow myself to remain in this room with you, far less sleep in that bed, now you have made it obvious that your illness is an

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abominable sham ? I happen," she said, " to be a lady of principle."

" Yes, yes," said Lord Braxo, " I don't doubt it, ma'am. But you are also a very tired lady of principle, and may I point out that only you and I know that I am not, in actual fact, at death's door, and that not even the strictest judge ever assumed a lady could be compromised by carrying out the humane duty of nursing the sick.

" Moreover, there are some convenient screens here which suppose I set up—so, around the bed which is the cause of all the trouble, and suppose I then retire to this singularly uncomfortable chair at my end of the apartment, pledging my word as a gentleman that I shall not leave it without your permission—and damme, ma'am, if you're half as tired as I believe you to be, and half as sensible as I think you are, you will help yourself to a few refreshing hours of sweet slumber while you may."

She looked at him long and earnestly before she consented to this arrangement, but she did so in the end, impelled by sheer fatigue and not really reassured when, as she went behind the screens, he said : " Dream tenderly of me, my sweet Mellicent, won't you ? "

The fickle climate brought a morning fine and clear, with only a few tattered fragments of cloud caught in the teeth of the mountains. The streams subsided as quickly as they had risen.

It was past nine when Lord Braxo, somewhat cramped in his shoulder-blades, awoke in his high-backed chair, and by that time Miss Louisa Martin was several miles distant, heading north in the chaise and four, having told the landlord that the invalid was sleeping and that in the meantime she would go to summon a near-by relative and return within the hour. When his lordship did awaken, he roused the house with an angry clamour, although the pimple-faced student said that such excitement was likely to prove fatal.

A little before noon Miss Louisa's chaise and four was slowly ascending the last long hill, after which the way would slope continually downward to Carlisle and Solway. So quickly had the upland wind and the broad sunlight dried the land that the highway was now mealy with dust. And on the road's horizon behind her there suddenly appeared a small yellow cobweb of this dust.

It grew into a fuzzy yellow bush and out of it emerged a single rider, sparing neither himself nor the rather shapely roan he bestrode. A few moments later Lord Braxo, who had not ridden so lustily for twenty years, thundered up to the chaise, commanded the postilions to halt in a voice that allowed of no argument, and from his saddle glowered down at the imperturbable Miss Martin.

" So, madam," he said, " this is how you repay me for the trouble I took to ensure your comfort last night ? "

" Lord Braxo," she answered, " this is how I repay you for the

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quite unnecessary anxiety and alarm you caused me last night."

"A perfectly futile statement, madam," he told her. "It is extremely unlikely that you were ever able to feel any anxiety or alarm on my account. And moreover there is clearly no longer any need for hurry, since those we were pursuing have been in Scotland twelve hours and more, and have gone to the devil together, as they wished, whatever you and I may think about the matter.

"And do you know what vast expense and trouble you have put me to? Do you know that I've had to scour three parishes and buy bloodstock, at ten guineas a hoof, as a result of your trickery, madam, your base ingratitude, your shameless deceitfulness?"

"But sir," she protested gently, "I may choose my pace, as —I hope—I may choose my company."

He swallowed with an effort and set his face.

"Very well, madam," he said, "I bid you good day."

He was about to leave the chaise, but quickly drew rein.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said. "Are you by any chance laughing at me?"

It was too plain to be denied.

"This morning," she said, "it's *my* turn."

He did not at first take this very well. His face became so congested it looked as if the Chinese palsy were returning. But then that light and malicious gleam came back to his eye.

"One moment, my dear lady!" he said. "Isn't it possible that you're laughing a little too soon?"

"Too soon?" she echoed. "How could that be?"

"I suppose, madam," he said, "that it has not occurred to you that as a result of your rash behaviour you have for ever sacrificed your good name? It is perfectly within the limits of propriety, as you yourself pointed out, to nurse a sick man, but if it appears that the man is not sick, does not the whole escapade assume the aspect of a particularly unpleasant subterfuge, upon which the world will put only one construction?"

(He was pleased with himself again and waved casually at a chaise that came rattling past them, southbound. "Seen that fellow before somewhere," he murmured.)

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Martin. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Aha!" exclaimed Lord Braxo. "You hadn't thought of it! Great heavens!" he cried suddenly, staring back after the chaise that had passed them and which was rapidly disappearing across the fells, "That was John! John and that damned niece of yours!"

"Yes, I know," said Miss Martin casually. "I saw them. But it's no good stopping them and having a scene now, is it? It's over. They've done it. What can we do?"

"Headstrong young fools," he said. "Why, the only thing we

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can do is to punish them, ma'am. They've shown an utter contempt for parental authority; well, we must show an equal contempt for filial regard. Was your niece very fond of you, ma'am?"

"Oh, she was," said Miss Louisa sadly, "yes indeed. I have been a mother to her, after all."

"And that boy was deeply attached to his poor father, too. It's a shock when a person to whom you're so devoted goes off to Gretna Hall and does a thing like this, without even having the consideration to consult you about it. Don't you feel it is, ma'am?"

"I do. I do indeed."

"Very well, then," said Lord Braxo. "Our duty is plain, ma'am. The punishment must be suited to the crime. They must be made to suffer as they have made us suffer. We owe it to our children, if you permit me to refer to your niece in that way. They must, in the words of the Scriptures, be done by as they did. And by acting in accordance with this precept we can also atone for your reckless behaviour of last night and once more restore you to the company of the virtuous. Miss Martin, my dear Mellicent, you must accompany me to Scotland, and there, standing with me before that anvil upon which no horseshoe was ever fashioned, you must—"

"Pray don't be so ridiculous, Lord Braxo," said Miss Martin. "And if you insist on addressing me in that manner I must demand that you remember my name is Louisa."

"I prefer Mellicent," he answered, "and I shall continue to use that name throughout our married life, which I don't doubt will be extremely long and happy. But we must not think of ourselves, you know. It is a matter of discipline. We must think of our children. That is, of my son and your niece. It is for their good entirely that I put the suggestion forward. As for yourself, ma'am, you have no choice in the matter. The stain on your character can only be removed by your coming to Gretna with me with as little delay as possible."

"That is *quite* preposterous," said Miss Martin. "However, we must certainly go to Gretna in order to see the register and acquaint ourselves with what really has happened there. If you desire to, you may accompany me."

"Hitch this bayard on behind," said Lord Braxo, to the nearer postilion. "I will go with the lady in the chaise. Now," he said, a few moments later, as he settled himself into that vehicle, "drive on, boy—to Scotland and connubial bliss!"

* * *

A man should be just cultured enough to be able to look with suspicion upon culture.

SAMUEL BUTLER

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STAR IN THE EAST

"But what have stars to do with bullocks?" muttered Joseph

by E. MACWHIRTER

IT was Christmas Eve and the shadows of the grazing cattle had lengthened across the grass and stretched themselves out tenuously into the Indian twilight. Down in the village, evening fires were smoking, acrid and blue, and from every gateway the inviting scents of cooking were spicing the dusk. At the corner by the *pan* shop a crowd, gathering to witness the implementing of justice, clamoured good-naturedly about three central figures.

Daniel-the-Oraon, small, persuasive and voluble, and Joseph-the-Munda, strong-chinned and obstinate, both embittered by their month-long dispute, stood glowering wordlessly at each other.

Between them Peter-the-Catechist fingered his rosary in a nervous brown hand. He had listened that morning to their claims and accusations, in great detail, when, indignant-eyed and vociferous, they had appeared before him each with his hand on the horn of a bullock.

The bullock was squat and angular: its hide was the indiscriminate grey that suggests long years of weathering, its eyes had the comprehending patience of all beasts of burden and in any village herd it would have passed unnoticed had it not been for an irregularity in the symmetry of its horns. Whilst the left horn rose stalwart in bull-like pride, its partner curved whimsically downwards above the right eye, and on this eccentricity alone rested the matter of the bullock's identity.

There had been, it transpired, two such wry-horned bullocks in the village, one belonging to Joseph-the-Munda which he claimed to have owned so long that it had assisted in the original building of the church, and the other belonging to Daniel-the-Oraon which he contended was equally well known for it always helped draw the cart when the Reverend Father paid his quarterly visit to their church.

One of these two wry-horned bullocks had for the past month lain dead out on the plain, nocturnal victim of a leopard, and the other which Daniel himself drove to his home each evening, as had

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always been his cautious habit, was now claimed by Joseph as his property, cunningly misappropriated by the Oraon.

Peter-the-Catechist having at length sorted the facts from the welter of vituperative accusation, and having looked searchingly from man to man and found no visible trace of guilt in either face, addressed them soberly.

"You are both good Christians," he said, "you are both sensible men, prosperous and respected in our community, and yet you both claim to be the owner of this animal. And therefore one of you if not deliberately lying must be obstinately mistaken.

"You have brought half the village with you as witness but no one has been able to establish the animal's ownership. First the people accord it to Joseph and then they agree it belongs to Daniel. No reliance can be placed on such testimony, so how am I to judge?

"If the truth is not admitted in your own hearts, and you cannot settle this quarrel amicably, as all Christian quarrels should be settled particularly at this Christmas season, then must we seek guidance Above."

When the prayer had ended Peter's judgment had been delivered.

"If this animal belongs rightly to Joseph, and Daniel by fetching it home from the *maidan* each evening has withheld it from its rightful owner, surely the matter can be decided by allowing the animal to come home unaccompanied in the village herd.

"If Daniel sets no hand on it and it is Joseph's bullock then will it go to Joseph's house, but if it is after all Daniel's animal then will it not turn aside until it reaches Daniel's gateway."

"But Daniel has coerced it to his house for the past month," Joseph cried. "How will it now remember the scent of its home?"

"Joseph's gate comes before mine; will he not entice it with smells of food delectable to bullocks and . . ."

"Peace!" ordered Peter-the-Catechist. "You have come to me for judgment. We have prayed for wisdom and justice in the matter. It only remains now for the animal to claim its rightful master. Let it be driven to the grazing ground and this evening it shall come unmolested to its home, and thus this argument shall be settled in all fairness before we celebrate our Christmas festival."

And now as they stood waiting for the cattle by the *pan* shop with the evening star slowly brightening above them, Daniel's eyes beneath the twist of his turquoise head-cloth were narrowed and anxious, and Joseph's face rising from the crimson folds of his blanket was less confident than concerned.

The crowd had fallen into rival groups, bandying gibes and taunts in an atmosphere of growing excitement. Only Peter-the-

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Catechist maintained an impartial air. He alone refrained from cheering as the wry-horned bullock entered the street, and he set out some fifty paces behind to follow it, with Daniel on his right hand and Joseph on his left, and the crowd at his heels.

The bullock meandered along with the other village cattle. Their legs moved stiffly, their tails swung languidly, their voices lowed questioningly, and their bells covered the whole gamut of cattle-bell tones from the sonorous brass at the neck of the leading bull to the tinkling frivolity on the most skittish of the calves. The dust stirred softly beneath their hooves and, mingling with the sweetish scent of their passing, greeted the nostrils of the advancing villagers.

At the shoemaker's gate the first animals left the herd: at the tailor's house more turned aside; and as they advanced down the dusk of the village street recognizing and entering familiar gates and pathways, curious faces peered from dimly-lit shop fronts and darkened alley-ways to watch the procession go by.

The petrol-lamp flaring suddenly from the police-outpost blinded the animals momentarily: they paused irresolute. And here the crowd fell silent, for next to the police-outpost was the turning to Joseph's gate where, if the Munda had spoken the truth, the wry-horned bullock must join his other cattle and disappear behind the *duranta* hedge.

Already the herd was passing the entrance; now Joseph's three brown-and-white cows were turning away, and now the disputed bullock was drawing level with the gateway. The crowd paused expectantly, every eye following the grey outline.

The bullock moved slowly along looking at the ground before it and turning its head neither to right nor to left as it approached, drew level with, and passed Joseph's house. There was a quick sibilance of breath. Daniel's supporters clamoured victoriously about him and the light from the police-outpost falling on Joseph's face revealed the anger in his eyes.

"It is unfair," he cried, clutching at the catechist's arm. "It is a plot to deprive me of my bullock. How could it be expected to know its rightful home when it has been forcibly driven to Daniel's house each night for the past month?"

"You agreed to abide by my ruling so there can be no argument now," the catechist reproved him. "Let us go on and see justice fulfilled."

"Justice!" snorted Joseph. "You talk to me about justice and allow Daniel to steal my bullock brazenly under my very nose. Certainly I will go on with you, for the Oraon would be mistaken indeed if he imagined I should be content to give up my claim on such slight grounds."

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"This is no talk for Christmas-tide," Peter admonished him, "when men's hearts should be filled with love and goodwill for one another. Can you look up to the sky above you and see the star that shines there so significantly this night, and still harbour such unchristian thoughts?"

"Stars!" muttered Joseph. "What have stars to do with bullocks?" and wrapping the blanket more closely about his shoulders he moved on silent and glowering at the catechist's side.

The herd, now much depleted, straggled on, threading in and out of shadows, past shops and shoppers, creaking bullock-carts and the well beside the peepul tree, on towards the whitewashed façade of Ramprosad-the-Marwari's store where electricity gleamed on gaudy paper-chains and twinkling witch-balls, on a box of coloured crackers and a row of toy-filled stockings. As they drew level the notes of the cattle-bells and the voices of the crowd were lost in a volume of song, for within the shop a radio surged with the rejoicing of far distant carol-singers:

"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by . . ."

The crowd hesitated as if it would cluster about the door-way to listen, but the cattle moving inexorably on were coming to the corner where Daniel's fence began. The herd had reached Daniel's gate by the time the catechist and the two claimants rounded the bend, and already a string of shadows was disappearing under the trailing purple of the Bougainvillæa archway.

"See, the bullock comes to his rightful home!" Daniel called, thrusting his head triumphantly at Joseph. "And who now told the truth? And whose is the bullock whose bones lie whitening on the plain? Tell us that, you man of mis-statements."

But Joseph was not listening to his enemy's taunts. His attention was riveted on a pair of wry horns. Moving neither to right nor to left they had glided away from the Bougainvillæa archway and were disappearing, straight ahead, into the shadows of the road.

The crowd fell silent; Daniel was left with his mouth foolishly agape on his untimely exultation, and Joseph, standing with compressed lips and folded arms, was a study in sardonic righteousness. The catechist fingered his chin in perplexity whilst everyone waited to see what would happen next.

"Let us follow on," said Peter at last. "It is possible that both Joseph and Daniel were mistaken in their claim and that the animal

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now approaches its rightful home. We will discover whither it goes."

After they had passed the second well, the lights of the village grew fewer and more solitary, and all the herd had found a home with the exception of the grey bullock which still moved quietly along the highway under the cold starry sky.

"This is ridiculous," Joseph protested, "the animal is clearly lost."

"It has never been used to finding its own way home," Daniel countered, "and now of course it seeks in vain for guidance."

"The bullock has not the air of a lost animal," the catechist demurred. "See, it looks neither to right nor to left nor pauses to graze, but moves purposefully on."

"But this is the roadway leading to Peter's own compound," cried a sly voice from the crowd.

"A trick has been played on us," shouted Joseph indignantly.

"It is a plot to steal the bullock for yourself," Daniel accused the catechist.

"Do not let your disappointment run away with you," Peter admonished them, "nor allot your own base motives to other minds. Have patience!"

"But the animal may wander foolishly all night."

"It will be lost in the jungle."

"If it seems truly lost and strays towards the jungle," Peter decreed, "then we must impound it until the Christmas festivities are ended and we can make another attempt. Come, we shall lose sight of it."

His words fell on deaf ears, for Daniel and Joseph, upheld by the encouraging cries of their supporters, had fallen to the most recriminative quarrelling, and nothing Peter could say had any effect on the ensuing uproar. It was the catechist's grandson who silenced him. "Look, look," he shrilled in his penetrating voice, "the bullock!"

All heads turned and peered into the darkness where the silhouette of the bullock could be dimly discerned against the starlit sky. It was moving towards a pathway at the side of the road.

Hooves echoed hollowly on the wooden boards bridging a ditch, and poinsettias brushed their scarlet leaves against the worn grey hide as the animal climbed steadily to a lighted door where, scrabbling uncertainly up the steps and tangling its proud horn in a wreath of greenery, it disappeared from view.

Within the bullock halted and looked about it as if it were bewildered by the lighted candles and the red and green garlands. It tossed its head trying to rid itself of the leaves caught about its

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horn, then slowly it crossed the narrow floor of the church and, coming at last to its destination, folded itself gratefully into the clean straw beside the Christmas Crib.

In the doorway the faces of Daniel and Joseph had softened to identical expressions of amazement. Beside them the catechist humbly crossed himself. Outside, the crowd pressed forward in voiceless wonder. Overhead a bright star shone; and down in the village Ramprosad-the-Marwari's radio carolled out into the Christmas night,

"*Good Christian men, rejoice*
With heart, and soul, and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say:
News! News!
Jesus Christ is born today:
Ox and Ass before Him bow,
And He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!"

* * *

WEDDED BLISS

A perfect marriage is a hearth and a horizon.
PRINCESS ANTOINE BIBESCO

There is no hope for men who do not boast that their wives bully them. G. K. CHESTERTON

Every time I argue with my wife, words flail me.
Author Unknown

My wife has a whim of iron.
OLIVER HERFORD

"My wife and I had words, but I didn't get around to using mine." *Author Unknown*

Being married to those sleepy-souled women is just like playing at cards for nothing. Dr. JOHNSON

. . . the Western custom of one wife and hardly any mistresses. SAKI

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OVER INSURANCE

They hugged each other very tightly and exchanged kisses

by JOHN COLLIER

ALICE and Irwin were as simple and as happy as any young couple in a family-style movie. In fact, they were even happier, for people were not looking at them all the time and their joys were not restricted by the censorship code. It is therefore impossible to describe the transports with which Alice flew to embrace Irwin on his return from work, or the rapture with which Irwin returned her caresses.

It was at least two hours before they even thought about dinner. Even then, it took a long time to get the food on the table, there was so much patting and petting, nibbling at the nape of the neck, mumbling of ears, kissing, fondling, and foolishness to the carrying of every single dish.

When at last the meal was ready, you may be sure they ate with excellent appetite. Nevertheless, whatever was best on his plate, he found time to put it on hers, and she was no slower in picking out some dainty titbit to pop between his eager and rather rubbery lips.

After dinner they would sit in one chair, for all the world like two innocent love-birds in a cage, and he would entertain her with a detailed catalogue of her charms, which gave her the highest possible opinion of his taste and judgment. However, these delights did not endure very long, for they found it necessary to go to bed at an early hour, in order to rise bright and fresh in the morning.

It was a dull and heavy night when he did not wake up once or twice, and switch on the light to assure himself she was not merely a delightful dream. She, blinking through the rosy radiance, was not in the least annoyed at being thus awakened, and they would have a very delightful little conversation and soon would fall happily asleep again.

It is not likely that a husband whose evenings are so contentedly spent at home will often linger in clubs and pubs when the day's work is done. It was only on rare occasions that Irwin suffered himself to be persuaded, and even then he would suddenly think of his darling; how plump, how soft, how deliciously rounded she was, and he would give a sort of frisk or leap into the air.

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"Why the hell did you do that?" his friends would demand. "Did you think someone was sticking a pin into you or something?"

"No, no," he would reply evasively. "I am just on top of the world. I was just feeling full of beans."

With that, he would grin all over his face like a fool, and take hasty leave of them, and rush home at top speed, eager to reassure himself as to the genuine existence, and his own miraculous possession, of those tender, those rounded, those infinitely sweet details that made up his delectable little wife.

On one of these occasions he was darting home as fast as his legs would carry him, when he forgot to look about him in crossing the street, and a taxi came swiftly round the corner. Fortunately the driver jammed on his brakes; otherwise Irwin would have been bowled over like a ninepin, and might never have seen his little honey any more. This thought appalled him.

That night they were seated as usual in their single chair, she tenderly stroking his somewhat sallow cheeks, and he protruding his lips, like some eager ape at the approach of a milk bottle, in the attempt to imprint kisses on her passing hand. In this interval it was his custom to recite all the events of the long day, and especially how he had missed her.

"And that reminds me," said he, "I was very narrowly missed myself, by a taxi, as I was crossing the street, and if the driver had not put his brakes on I should have been bowled over like a ninepin. And then maybe I should never have seen my darling honey any more."

At these words her lips trembled, and her eyes brimmed over with tears. "If *you* didn't see me any more," she said, "then I wouldn't see *you* any more."

"I was just thinking of that," said Irwin.

"We always have the same thoughts," said she.

This, however, was no consolation; their thoughts that evening were so unutterably sad. "All day tomorrow," said Alice, weeping, "I shall be seeing you lying all squashed in the gutter. I'm sure it will be too much for me. I shall just lie down and die."

"Oh, I wish you had not said that," said Irwin. "Now I shall be thinking of you lying all crumpled on the hearth-rug. I shall go mad, or die."

"Oh, no!" cried Alice. "Now I shall think of you dying because you think I might be dead. The thought will kill me."

"Now it's even worse," lamented Irwin. "Supposing you should die because you think that I've died because . . . It's too much! I can't bear it!"

"Nor can I," said she.

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They hugged each other very tightly, and exchanged kisses rendered surpassingly salty by their tears. This is thought by some to add relish, as with peanuts, by bringing out the sweetness.

Irwin and Alice were too overcome to appreciate fine points of this nature; they could think of nothing but of how each would feel if the other should suddenly die. Consequently they got never a wink of sleep all night long, and Irwin was deprived of the pleasure of dreaming of his Alice, and of switching on the light to find that she was true.

She, on her side, was denied the joy of blinking up in a sudden rosy radiance to see him hovering and goggling over her. They made up for this by the passion and fervour of their embraces. Consequently, when the dawn came cool and grey and rational in at their window, the unhappy pair were themselves feeling cooler, greyer, and more rational than at any time since they had first met.

"Alice," said Irwin, "we must look at this bravely. We must face up to what may happen, and do our best to provide what consolation we can."

"My only consolation will be to cry," said she.

"Yes, and mine, too," said he. "But would you rather cry in a fireless garret, and have to stop and get up and do your own housework, or would you rather cry in a fine apartment, with a mink coat on, and plenty of servants to bring in your meals?"

"I would rather have my meals brought in," said she. "Because then I could go right on crying. And if I had a mink coat on I should not catch cold, and sneeze in the middle of it."

"And I would rather cry on a yacht," said he, "where my tears could be ascribed to the salt spray, and I should not be thought unmanly.

"Let us insure one another, darling, so that if the worst happens we can cry without interruption. Let us put nine-tenths of our money into insurance."

"It will leave us very little to live on now," said she. "But that is all the better, beloved, because then it will be all the more of a consolation *then*."

"That was exactly my idea," said he. "We always have the same thoughts. This very day I will take out the policies."

"And let us," cried she, "insure our dear bird also," pointing to the feathered cageling, whom they always left uncovered at night, in order that his impassioned trills might grace their diviner raptures.

"You are right," said he. "I will put ten dollars on the bird. His chirpings would be as a string of pearls to me, if ever I were left alone."

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That day Irwin made arrangements for the investment of nine-tenths of his earnings.

"We are poor," said he, on his return, "but we have each other. If ever we are robbed of that joy we shall at least have many thousands of dollars."

"Do not speak of them," said she. "Hateful dollars!"

"By all means," said he. "Let us have dinner. I was very economical at lunch, and I am unusually hungry this evening."

"It will not take long," said she. "I was economical at the market, and have bought a new sort of food. It is amazingly cheap, and it contains a whole alphabet of vitamins, enough to keep a whole family in pep and energy for a week. It says so in the description on the packet."

"Splendid!" said he. "Depend upon it; your dear, sweet, tender little metabolism, and my great gruff, bearish metabolism, will spell all the honey-dovey-love-words in creation out of that same alphabet of vitamins."

No prospect could be more agreeable, but as the days passed it appeared that their metabolism would have put up a poor show at any word-making game. Or perhaps the manufacturer of the product had been misled by some alien-minded scientist, and had thus erred slightly in the description on the packet.

Irwin grew so weak that he could no longer leap into the air at the thought of his darling, his tender, his deliciously rounded little wife. On the other hand, Alice grew so thin that he no longer had any reason to do so.

Her stockings now wrinkled revoltingly upon her stick-like legs.

"I think," mused Irwin, "she no longer rushes to greet me with eager rapture as of yore. Perhaps it's as well. How much more delightful to be greeted by a porterhouse steak!"

What with this new, disturbing thought, and his sawdust diet, and the innumerable financial worries that so frequently beset the young lovers, now that nine-tenths of their income went into insurance, Irwin frequently passed wakeful nights, but he no longer felt impelled to switch on the light, and feast his eyes on his beloved. The last time he had done so, she had mistaken his face for an omelette. "Oh, it's only you," she had murmured, turning crossly away.

They fed their new diet to the bird, who soon afterwards flopped on his back, threw up his feet, and died.

"At least we get fifty dollars on him," said Irwin. "And he is only a bird!"

"I hope we are not thinking the same thought," said Alice.

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"Of course not," said he. "How can you imagine it?"

"*I* certainly am not," said she. "How shall we spend the money? Shall we buy another canary?"

"No," said he. "Let us have something bigger. Let us buy a big, fat roasting chicken."

"So we will," said she, "and potatoes and mushrooms, and French beans, and chocolate cake, and cream, and coffee."

"Yes," said he. "And coffee. Get some good, strong, bitter coffee; something with a real kick to it, if you know what I mean."

"I will get," said she, "the best, the strongest, and the bitterest I can."

That night they were not long in carrying in the dishes, nor in emptying them when they were on the table.

"This is certainly good strong coffee," said Irwin. "And bitter."

"Is it not?" said she. "You didn't, by any chance, change the cups round while I was in the kitchen?"

"No, dear," said Irwin. "I was just wondering if you had. It certainly seems to have a kick in it."

"Oh, Irwin!" cried Alice. "Is it possible we had the same thought after all?"

"It feels like it," cried Irwin, legging it for the door faster even than he had done in the old days, when he used to leave his friends in pubs or clubs and rush home with such impetuous speed. "I must get to a doctor."

"So must I," said she, fumbling also for the latch.

The poison, however, acted extremely quickly on their weakened constitutions. Even as they scuffled for precedence they fell prone upon the door-mat, and the postman came and covered them with bills.

* * *

QUEER BIRD

The grackle's voice is less than mellow,
His heart is black, his eye is yellow,
He bullies more attractive birds
With hoodlum deeds and vulgar words,
And should a human interfere,
Attacks that human in the rear.
I cannot help but deem the grackle
An ornithological debacle.

OGDEN NASH

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NOWELL

And all the bells on earth shall ring,
On Chrissimas Day, on Chrissimas Day . . .

Author Unknown

Rudi, trimming a Christmas tree for the first time, was in a pleased and excited frame of mind . . . At the foot of the tree he had already arranged a small landscape for the Oberammergau Krippe. The Inn at Bethlehem was a bark cavern designed by himself, with a tiny electric lamp behind a silver star. The animals strayed in a lifelike way over the mossy slopes of a green mound; fir trees sheltered the shepherds, made from the smaller branches of his tree; the kings on camels wound gaily up a perilous cardboard path.

In the middle of the cavern lay the haloed Babe in a bark cradle, with His kneeling mother bending over Him. Oxen and asses were His guard; and a tiny electric bulb was hidden in moss before the crib.

Rudi, looking down on his work with satisfaction, thought that they had never had a better Bethlehem.

PHYLLIS BOTTOME, *The Mortal Storm*

The Coming

The darling of the world is come,
And fit it is we find a room
To welcome Him.

ROBERT HERRICK, 1591–1674

These Are the Magi

"Jim," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present . . ."

"You say your hair is gone?" he said with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you . . ."

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a

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shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But, if you'll unwrap that package, you may see why you had me going awhile at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas; a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails . . . For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise-shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair . . .

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della leaped up . . . Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em awhile. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs . . ."

The Magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the Magi.

O. HENRY, *The Gift of the Magi*

God Rest Ye

God rest ye, little children; let nothing you affright,
For Jesus Christ, your Saviour, was born this happy night;
Along the hills of Galilee the white flocks sleeping lay,
When Christ, the Child of Nazareth, was born on Christmas day.

D. M. MULOCK CRAIK

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Beatitude

There was an entertainment, known no doubt to those who organised it by some magniloquent title, which we called briefly "Santa Claus." Santa Claus was always held in a great hall in the centre of Cardiff. It was a feed, and an entertainment, and a bright new penny for each child, and as you left you were given a bag containing an apple and an orange and some cast-off clothing.

It doesn't sound great fun; and I suppose that to children whose Christmas entertainment is stalls at the pantomime and everything else to scale it wouldn't be great fun; but Santa Claus remains, all the same, in my mind as a highlight, a time of chewing and bawling, of gusty good humour, and the surprise of the sack which you lugged home to see what your mother's patient fingers could do with the garments it contained.

These were strange things from which to extract joy, but joy we found in them . . .

HOWARD SPRING, *Heaven Lies About Us*

Song of Angels

Now blessed be the tow'rs
that crown England so fair
That stand up strong in prayer
unto God for our souls:
Blessed be their founders
(said I) an' our country folk
Who are ringing for Christ
in the belfries tonight
With arms lifted to clutch
the rattling ropes that race
Into the dark above
and the mad romping din.

But to me heard afar
it was starry music
Angels' song, comforting
as the comfort of Christ
When he spake tenderly
to his sorrowful flock:
The old words came to me
by the riches of time
Mellow'd and transfigured
as I stood on the hill
Heark'ning in the aspect
of th' eternal silence.

ROBERT BRIDGES, *Noel: Christmas Eve*, 1913

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★*The theme of John Steinbeck's brilliant new novel "East of Eden" grows and spreads like a great tree in the midst of that ageless garden : it is rooted in pain and lust, excitement and love. The chapters given below concern Dessie and Tom Hamilton. After their father's death, they could not recapture the old happiness which was their life-blood. Deprived of the strength of the parent tree, life is slowly, imperceptibly sapped from beloved Dessie, in this strangely beautiful branch of the story.*

AFTERGLOW

by JOHN STEINBECK

DESSIE HAMILTON was the beloved of the family. Mollie Hamilton the pretty kitten, Olive the strong-headed, Una with clouds on her head, all were loved, but Dessie was the warm-beloved. Hers was the twinkle and the laughter infectious as chicken-pox, and hers the gaiety that coloured a day and spread to people so that they carried it away with them.

I can put it this way. Mrs. Clarence Morrison of 122 Church Street, Salinas, had three children and a husband who ran a dry goods store. On certain mornings, at breakfast, Agnes Morrison would say, "I'm going to Dessie Hamilton's for a fitting after dinner."

The children would be glad and would kick their copper toes against the table-legs until cautioned. And Mr. Morrison would rub his palms together and go to his store, hoping some drummer would come by that day. And any drummer who did come by was likely to get a good order. Maybe the children and Mr. Morrison would forget why it was a good day with a promise on its tail.

Mrs. Morrison would go to the house next to Reynaud's bakery at two o'clock and she would stay until four. When she came out her eyes would be wet with tears and her nose red and streaming. Walking home, she would dab her nose and wipe her eyes and laugh all over again.

Maybe all Dessie had done was to put several black pins in a cushion to make it look like the Baptist minister, and then had the pincushion deliver a short dry sermon. Maybe she had recounted a meeting with Old Man Taylor, who bought old houses and moved them to a big vacant lot he owned until he had so many it looked

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like a dry-land Sargasso Sea. Maybe she had read a poem from *Chatterbox* with gestures. It didn't matter. It was warm-funny, it was catching funny.

The Morrison children, coming home from school, would find no aches, no carping, no headache. Their noise was not a scandal nor their dirty faces a care. And when the giggles overcame them, why, their mother was giggling too.

Mr. Morrison, coming home, would tell of the day and get listened to, and he would try to re-tell the drummer's stories—some of them at least. The supper would be delicious—omelettes never fell and cakes rose to balloons of lightness, biscuits fluffed up, and no one could season a stew like Agnes Morrison.

After supper, when the children had laughed themselves to sleep, like as not Mr. Morrison would touch Agnes on the shoulder in their old, old signal and they would go to bed and make love and be very happy.

The visit to Dessie might carry its charge into two days more before it petered out and the little headaches came back and business was not so good as last year. That's how Dessie was and that's what she could do. She carried excitement in her arms just as her father, Samuel, had done. She was the darling, she was the beloved of the family.

Dessie was not beautiful. Perhaps she wasn't even pretty, but she had the glow that makes men follow a woman in the hope of reflecting a little of it. You would have thought that in time she would have got over her first love affair and found another love, but she did not. Come to think of it, none of the Hamiltons, with all their versatility, had any versatility in love. None of them seemed capable of light or changeable love.

Dessie did not simply throw up her hands and give up. It was much worse than that. She went right on doing and being what she was—without the glow. The people who loved her ached for her, seeing her try, and they got to trying for her.

Dessie's friends were good and loyal but they were human, and humans love to feel good and they hate to feel bad. In time, the Mrs. Morrisons found unassailable reasons for not going to the little house by the bakery. They weren't disloyal. They didn't want to be sad as much as they wanted to be happy. It is easy to find a logical and virtuous reason for not doing what you don't want to do.

Dessie's business began to fall off. And the women who had thought they wanted dresses never realized that what they had wanted was happiness. Times were changing and the ready-made dress was becoming popular. It was no longer a disgrace to wear one. If Mr. Morrison was stocking ready-mades, it was only reasonable that Agnes Morrison should be seen in them.

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The family was worried about Dessie, but what could you do when she would not admit there was anything wrong with her? She did admit to pains in her side, quite fierce, but they lasted only a little while and came only at intervals.

Then Samuel, her father, died and the world shattered like a dish. His sons and daughters and friends groped about among the pieces, trying to put some kind of world together again.

Dessie decided to sell her business and go back to the ranch to live with Tom. She hadn't much of any business to sell out. Her mother, Liza, knew about it, and Olive, and Dessie had written to Tom. But Will, sitting scowling at the table in the San Francisco Chop House, had not been told. Will frothed inwardly and finally he balled up his napkin and got up.

He walked the half-block to Dessie's house and went through the high-grown garden and rang Dessie's bell.

She was having her dinner alone, and she came to the door with her napkin in her hand. "Why, hullo, Will," she said and put up her pink cheek for her brother to kiss. "When did you get into town?"

"Business," he said. "Just here between trains. I want to talk to you."

She led him back to her kitchen and dining-room combined, a warm little room papered with flowers. Automatically she poured a cup of coffee and placed it for him and put the sugar bowl and the cream jug in front of it.

"Have you seen mother?" she asked.

"I'm just here over trains," he said gruffly. "Dessie, is it true you want to go back to the ranch?"

"I was thinking of it."

"I don't want you to go."

She smiled uncertainly. "Why not? What's wrong with that? Tom's lonely down there."

"You've got a nice business here," he said.

"I haven't any business here," she replied. "I thought you knew that."

"I don't want you to go," he repeated sullenly.

Her smile at him was wistful and she tried her best to put a little mockery in her manner.

"My big brother is masterful. Tell Dessie why not."

"It's too lonely down there."

"It won't be as lonely with the two of us."

Will pulled at his lips angrily. He blurted, "Tom's not himself. You shouldn't be alone with him."

"Isn't he well? Does he need help?"

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Will said, "I didn't want to tell you—I don't think Tom's ever got over—the death. He's strange."

She smiled affectionately. "Will, you've always thought he was strange. You thought he was strange when he didn't like business."

"That was different. But now he's broody. He doesn't talk. He goes walking alone in the hills at night. I went out to see him and—he's been writing poetry—pages of it, all over the table."

"Didn't you ever write poetry, Will?"

"I did not."

"I have," said Dessie. "Pages and pages of it, all over the table."

"I don't want you to go."

"Let me decide," she said softly. "I've lost something. I want to try to find it again."

"You're talking foolish."

She came round the table and put her arms around his neck. "Dear brother," she said, "please let me decide."

He went angrily out of the house and barely caught his train.

Tom met Dessie at the King City station. She saw him out of the train window, scanning every coach for her. He was burnished, his face shaved so close that its darkness had a shine like polished wood. His red moustache was clipped. He wore a new Stetson hat with a flat crown, a tan Norfolk jacket with a belt-buckle of mother-of-pearl.

His shoes glinted so brightly in the noonday light that he must have gone over them with his handkerchief just before the train arrived. His hard collar stood up against his strong red neck, and he wore a pale blue knitted tie with a horseshoe tie-pin. He tried to conceal his excitement by clasping his rough brown hands in front of him.

Dessie waved wildly out the window, crying, "Here I am, Tom, here I am!" though she knew he couldn't hear her over the grinding wheels of the train as the coach slid past him. She climbed down the steps and saw him looking frantically about in the wrong direction. She smiled and walked up behind him.

"I beg your pardon, stranger," she said quietly. "Is there a Mister Tom Hamilton here?"

He spun round and he squealed with pleasure and picked her up in a bear hug and danced her around. He held her off the ground with one arm and spanked her bottom with his free hand. He nuzzled her cheek with his harsh moustache. Then he held her back by the shoulders and looked at her. Both of them threw back their heads and howled with laughter.

The station agent leaned out of his window and rested his elbows,

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protected with black false sleeves, on the sill. He said over his shoulder to the telegrapher, "Those Hamiltons! Just look at them!"

Tom and Dessie, finger-tips touching, were doing a courtly heel-and-toe while he sang Doodle-doodle-doo and Dessie sang Deedle-deedle-dee, and then they embraced again.

Tom looked down at her. "Aren't you Dessie Hamilton? I seem to remember you. But you've changed. Where are your pigtails?"

It took him quite a fumbling time to get her luggage checks, to lose them in his pockets, to find them and pick up the wrong pieces. At last he had her baskets piled in the back of the buckboard. The two bay horses pawed the hard ground and threw up their heads so that the shined pole jumped and the double-trees squeaked. The harness was polished and the horse-brasses glittered like gold. There was a red bow tied half-way up the buggy whip and red ribbons were braided into the horses' manes and tails.

Tom helped Dessie into the seat and pretended to peek coyly at her ankle. Then he snapped up the check reins and unfastened the leather tie-reins from the bits. He unwrapped the lines from the whip stock, and the horses turned so sharply that the wheel screamed against the guard.

Tom said, "Would you care to make a tour of King City? It's a lovely town."

"No," she said. "I think I remember it." He turned left and headed south and lifted the horses to a fine swinging trot.

Dessie said, "Where's Will?"

"I don't know," he answered gruffly.

"Did he talk to you?"

"Yes. He said you shouldn't come."

"He told me the same thing," said Dessie. "He got George to write to me too."

"Why shouldn't you come if you want to?" Tom raged. "What's Will got to do with it?"

She touched his arm. "He thinks you're crazy. Says you're writing poetry."

Tom's face darkened. "He must have gone in the house when I wasn't there. What's he want anyway? He had no right to look at my papers."

"Gently, gently," said Dessie. "Will's your brother. Don't forget that."

"How would he like me to go through his papers?" Tom demanded.

"He wouldn't let you," Dessie said drily. "They'd be locked in the safe. Now let's not spoil the day with anger."

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" All right," he said. " God knows all right ! But he makes me mad. If I don't want to live his kind of life I'm crazy—just crazy."

Dessie changed the subject, forced the change. " You know, I had quite a time at the last," she said. " Mother wanted to come. Have you ever seen mother cry, Tom ? "

" No, not that I can remember. No, she's not a crier."

" Well, she cried. Not much, but a lot for her—a choke and two sniffles and a wiped nose and polished her glasses and snapped shut like a watch."

Tom said, " Oh, Lord, Dessie, it's good to have you back ! It's good. Makes me feel I'm well from a sickness."

The horses spanked along the county road. Tom said, " Adam Trask has bought a car. Or maybe I should say Will sold him a car."

" I didn't know about the car," said Dessie. " He's buying my house. Giving me a very good price for it."

She laughed. " I put a very high price on the house. I was going to come down during negotiations. Mr. Trask accepted the first price. It put me in a fix."

" What did you do, Dessie ? "

" Well, I had to tell him about the high price and that I had planned to be argued down. He didn't seem to care either way."

Tom said, " Let me beg you never to tell that story to Will. He'd have you locked up."

" But the house wasn't worth what I asked ! "

" I repeat what I said about Will. What's Adam Trask want with your house ? "

" He's going to move there. Wants the twins to go to school in Salinas."

" What'll he do with his ranch ? "

" I don't know. He didn't say."

Tom said, " I wonder what would have happened if father'd got hold of a ranch like that instead of Old Dry and Dusty."

" It isn't such a bad place."

" Fine for everything except making a living."

Dessie said earnestly, " Have you ever known any family that had more fun ? "

" No, I don't. But that was the family, not the land."

" Tom, remember when you took Jenny and Belle Williams to the Peachtree dance on the sofa ? "

" Mother never let me forget it. Say, wouldn't it be good to ask Jenny and Belle down for a visit ? "

" They'd come too," Dessie said. " Let's do it."

When they turned off the county road she said, " Somehow I remember it differently."

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"Drier?"

"I guess that's it. Tom, there's so much grass."

"I'm getting twenty head of stock to eat it."

"You must be rich."

"No, and the good year will break the price of beef. I wonder what Will would do. He's a scarcity man. He told me. He said, 'Always deal in scarcities.' Will's smart."

The rutty road had not changed except that the ruts were deeper and the round stones stuck up higher.

Dessie said, "What's the card on that mesquite bush?" She picked it off as they drove by, and it said, "Welcome Home."

"Tom, you did it!"

"I did not. Someone's been here."

Every fifty yards there was another card sticking on a bush, or hanging from the branches of a madrono, or tacked to the trunk of a buckeye, and all of them said, "Welcome Home." Dessie squealed with delight over each one.

They topped the rise above the little valley of the old Hamilton place and Tom pulled up to let her enjoy the view. On the hill across the valley, spelled out in whitewashed stones, were the huge words, WELCOME HOME, DESSIE. She put her head against his lapel and laughed and cried at the same time.

Tom looked sternly ahead of him. "Now who could have done that?" he said. "A man can't leave the place any more."

In the dawn Dessie was awakened by the chill of pain that came to her at intervals. It was a rustle and a threat of pain; it scampered up from her side and across her abdomen, a nibbling pinch and then a little grab, and then a hard catch and finally a fierce grip as though a huge hand had wrenched her.

When that relaxed she felt a soreness like a bruise. It didn't last very long, but while it went on the outside world was blotted out, and she seemed to be listening to the struggle in her body.

When only the soreness remained she saw how the dawn had come silver to the windows. She smelled the good morning wind rippling the curtains, bringing in the odour of grass and roots and damp earth. After that sounds joined the parade of perception—sparrows haggling among themselves, a bawling cow monotonously berating a punching hungry calf, a blue jay's squawk of false excitement, the sharp warning of the cock quail on guard and the answering whisper of the hen quail somewhere near in the tall grass.

The chicken-yard boiled with excitement over an egg, and a big lady Rhode Island Red, who weighed four pounds, hypocritically protested the horror of being lustfully pinned to the ground by a

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scrawny wreck of a rooster she could have blasted with one blow of her wing.

The cooing of pigeons brought memory into the procession. Dessie remembered how her father had said, sitting at the head of the table, "I told Rabbit Holman I was going to raise some pigeons and—do you know?—he said, 'No white pigeons.'

"'Why not white?' I asked him, and he said, 'They're the rare worst of bad luck. You take a flight of white pigeons and they'll bring sadness and death. Get grey ones.' 'I like white ones.' 'Get grey ones,' he told me. And as the sky covers me, I'll get white ones."

And her mother, Liza, said patiently, "Why do you be forever testing, Samuel? Grey ones taste just as good and they're bigger."

"I'll let no flimsy fairy tale push me," Samuel said.

And Liza said with her dreadful simplicity, "You're already pushed by your own contentiousness. You're a mule of contention, a very mule!"

"Someone's got to do these things," he said sullenly. "Else Fate would not ever get nose-thumbed, and mankind would still be clinging to the top branches of a tree."

And, of course, he got white pigeons and waited truculently for sadness and death until he'd proved his point. And here were the great-great-grand squabs cooing in the morning air and rising to fly like a whirling white scarf around the waggon shed.

As Dessie remembered, she heard the words and the house around her grew peopled. Sadness and death, she thought, and death and sadness, and it wrenched in her stomach against the soreness. You just have to wait around long enough and it will come.

She heard the air whooshing into the big bellows in the forge and the practice tap for range of hammer on anvil. She heard her mother open the oven door and the thump of a kneaded loaf on the floury board. Then Joe wandered about, looking in unlikely places for his shoes, and at last found them where he had left them under the bed.

She heard Mollie's sweet high voice in the kitchen, reading a morning text from the Bible, and Una's full, cold, throaty correction.

And Tom had cut Mollie's tongue with his pocket-knife and died in his heart when he realized his courage.

"Oh, dear Tom," she said, and her lips moved.

Tom's cowardice was as huge as his courage, as it must be in great men. His violence balanced his tenderness, and he himself was a pitted battle-field of his own forces. He was confused now, but Dessie could hold the bit and point him, the way a handler points a thoroughbred at the barrier to show his breeding and his form.

Dessie lay part in pain and a part of her dangled still in sleep

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while the morning brightened against the window. She remembered that Mollie was going to lead the Grand March at the Fourth of July picnic with no less than Harry Forbes, State Senator. And Dessie had not finished putting the braid on Mollie's dress. She struggled to get up. There was so much braid, and here she lay drowsing.

She cried, " I'll get it done, Mollie. It will be ready."

She got up from her bed and threw her robe around her and walked barefooted through the house crowded with Hamiltons. In the hall they were gone to the bedrooms. In the bedrooms, with the beds neat-made, they were all in the kitchen, and in the kitchen—they dispersed and were gone. Sadness and death. The wave receded and left her in dry awakeness.

The house was clean, scrubbed and immaculate, curtains washed, windows polished, but all as a man does it—the ironed curtains did not hang quite straight and there were streaks on the windows and a square showed on the table when a book was moved.

The stove was warming, with orange light showing around the lids and the soft thunder of draughty flame leaping past the open damper. The kitchen clock flashed its pendulum behind its glass skirt, and it ticked like a little wooden hammer striking on an empty wooden box.

From outside came a whistle as wild and raucous as a reed and pitched high and strange. The whistling scattered a savage melody. Then Tom's steps sounded on the porch, and he came in with an arm-load of oakwood so high he could not see over it. He cascaded the wood into the wood-box.

" You're up," he said. " That was to wake you if you were still sleeping." His face was lighted with joy. " This is a morning light as down and no time to be slugging."

" You sound like your father," Dessie said, and she laughed with him.

His joy hardened to fierceness.

" Yes," he said loudly. " And we'll have that time again, right here. I've been dragging myself in misery like a spine-broken snake. No wonder Will thought I was cracked. But now you're back, and I'll show you. I'll breathe life into life again. Do you hear ? This house is going to be alive."

" I'm glad I came," she said, and she thought in desolation how brittle he was now and how easy to shatter, and how she would have to protect him.

" You must have worked day and night to get the house so clean," she said.

" Nothing," said Tom. " A little twist with the fingers."

" I know that twist, but it was with bucket and mop and on your

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knees—unless you've invented some way to do it by chicken-power or the harnessed wind."

"Invented—now that's why I have no time. I've invented a little slot that lets a neck-tie slip around freely in a stiff collar."

"You don't wear stiff collars."

"I did yesterday. That's when I invented it. And chickens—I'm going to raise millions of them—little houses all over the ranch and a ring on the roof to dip them in a whitewash tank. And the eggs will come through on a little conveyor-belt—here! I'll draw it."

"I want to draw some breakfast," Dessie said. "What's the shape of a fried egg? How would you colour the fat and lean of a strip of bacon?"

"You'll have it," he cried, and he opened the stove-lid and assaulted the fire with the stove-lifter until the hairs on his hand curled and charred. He pitched wood in and started his high whistling.

Dessie said, "You sound like some goat-foot with a wheat flute on a hill in Greece."

"What do you think I am?" he shouted.

Dessie thought miserably. "If his is real, why can't my heart be light? Why can't I climb out of my grey ragbag? I will," she screeched inside herself. "If he can—I will."

She said, "Tom!"

"Yes."

"I want a purple egg."

The green lasted on the hills far into June before the grass turned yellow. The heads of the wild oats were so heavy with seed that they hung over on their stalks. The little springs trickled on late in the summer. The range cattle staggered under their fat and their hides shone with health. It was a year when the people of Salinas Valley forgot the dry years. Farmers bought more land than they could afford and figured their profits on the covers of their cheque-books.

Tom Hamilton laboured like a giant, not only with his strong arms and rough hands but also with his heart and spirit. The anvil rang in the forge again. He painted the old house white and whitewashed the sheds.

He went to King City and studied a flush toilet and then built one of craftily bent tin and carved wood. Because the water came so slowly from the spring, he put a redwood tank beside the house and pumped the water up to it with a hand-made windmill, so cleverly made that it turned in the slightest wind. And he made metal and wood models of two ideas to be sent to the patent office in the fall.

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That was not all—he laboured with humour and good spirits. Dessie had to rise very early to get in her hand at the housework before Tom had it all done. She watched his great red happiness, and it was not light as Samuel's happiness was light. It did not rise out of his roots and come floating up. He was manufacturing happiness as cleverly as he knew how, moulding it and shaping it.

Dessie, who had more friends than anyone in the whole valley, had no confidants. When her trouble had come upon her she had not talked about it. And the pains were a secret in herself.

When Tom found her rigid and tight from the grabbing pain and cried in alarm, " Dessie, what's the matter ? " she controlled her face and said, " A little crick, that's all. Just a little crick. I'm all right now." And in a moment they were laughing.

They laughed a great deal, as though to reassure themselves. Only when Dessie went to her bed did her loss fall on her, bleak and unendurable. And Tom lay in the dark of his room, puzzled as a child. He could hear his heart beating and rasping a little in its beat. His mind fell away from thought and clung for safety to little plans, designs, machines.

Sometimes in the summer evenings they walked up the hill to watch the afterglow clinging to the tops of the western mountains and to feel the breeze drawn into the valley by the rising day—heated air.

Usually they stood silently for a while and breathed in peacefulness. Since both were shy they never talked about themselves. Neither knew about the other at all.

It was startling to both of them when Dessie said one evening on the hill, " Tom, why don't you get married ? "

He looked quickly at her and away.

He said, " Who'd have me ? "

" Is that a joke or do you really mean it ? "

" Who'd have me ? " he said again. " Who'd want a thing like me ? "

" It sounds to me as though you really mean it." Then she violated their unstated code. " Have you been in love with someone ? "

" No," he said shortly.

" I wish I knew," she said as though he had not answered.

Tom did not speak again as they walked down the hill. But on the porch he said suddenly, " You're lonely here. You don't want to stay." He waited for a moment. " Answer me. Isn't that true ? "

" I want to stay here more than I want to stay any place else."

She asked, " Do you ever go to women ? "

" Yes," he said.

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"Is it any good to you?"

"Not much."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

In silence they went back to the house. Tom lighted the lamp in the old living-room. The horse-hair sofa he had rebuilt raised its goose-neck against the wall, and the green carpet had tracks worn light between the doors.

Tom sat down by the round centre table. Dessie sat on the sofa, and she could see that he was still embarrassed from his last admission.

She thought how pure he was, how unfit for a world that even she knew more about than he did. A dragon-killer, he was, a rescuer of damsels, and his small sins seemed so great to him that he felt unfit and unseemly.

She wished her father were here. Her father had felt greatness in Tom. Perhaps he would know now how to release it out of its darkness and let it fly free.

She took another tack to see whether she could raise some spark in him. "As long as we're talking about ourselves, have you ever thought that our whole world is the valley and a few trips to San Francisco, and have you ever been farther south than San Luis Obispo? I never have."

"Neither have I," said Tom.

"Well, isn't that silly?"

"Lots of people haven't," he said.

"But it's not a law. We could go to Paris and to Rome or to Jerusalem. I would dearly love to see the Colosseum."

He watched her suspiciously, suspecting some kind of joke.

"How could we?" he asked. "That takes a lot of money."

"I don't think it does," she said. "We wouldn't have to stay in fancy places. We could take the cheapest boats and the lowest class. That's how our father came here from Ireland. And we could go to Ireland."

Still he watched her, but a burning was beginning in his eyes.

Dessie went on, "We could take a year for work, save every penny. I can get some sewing to do in King City. Will would help us. And next summer you could sell all the stock and we could go. There's no law forbids it."

Tom got up and went outside. He looked up at the summer stars, at blue Venus and red Mars. His hands at his sides, he clenched and unclenched his fists. Then he turned and went back into the house. Dessie had not moved.

"Do you want to go, Dessie?"

"More than anything in the world."

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"Then we will go!"

"Do *you* want to go?"

"More than anything in the world," he said, and then, "Egypt—have you given a thought to Egypt?"

"Athens," she said.

"Constantinople!"

"Bethlehem!"

"Yes, Bethlehem," and he said suddenly, "Go to bed. We've got a year of work—a year. Get some rest. I'm going to borrow money from Will to buy a hundred shoats."

"What will you feed them?"

"Acorns," said Tom. "I'll make a machine to gather acorns."

After he had gone to his room she could hear him knocking around and talking softly to himself. Dessie looked out of her window at the starlit night and she was glad. But she wondered whether she really wanted to go, or whether Tom did. And as she wondered the whisper of pain grew up from her side.

When Dessie got up in the morning Tom was already at his drawing-board, beating his forehead with his fist and growling to himself. Dessie looked over his shoulder. "Is it the acorn-machine?"

"It should be easy," he said. "But how to get out the sticks and rocks?"

"I know you're the inventor, but I invented the greatest acorn-picker in the world and it's ready to go."

"What do you mean?"

"Children," she said. "Those restless little hands."

"They wouldn't do it, not even for pay."

"They would for prizes. A prize for everyone and a big prize for the winner—maybe a hundred-dollar prize. They'd sweep the valley clean. Will you let me try?"

He scratched his head. "Why not?" he said. "But how would you collect the acorns?"

"The children will bring them in," said Dessie. "Just let me take care of it. I hope you have plenty of storage space."

"It would be exploiting the young, wouldn't it?"

"Certainly it would," Dessie agreed. "When I had my shop I exploited the girls who wanted to learn to sew—and they exploited me. I think I will call this 'The Great Monterey County Acorn Contest.' And I won't let everyone in. Maybe bicycles for prizes—wouldn't you pick up acorns in hope of a bicycle, Tom?"

"Sure I would," he said. "But couldn't we pay them too?"

"Not with money," Dessie said. "That would reduce it to labour, and they will not labour if they can help it. Nor will I."

Tom leaned back from his board and laughed. "Nor will I,"

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he said. " All right, you are in charge of acorns and I am in charge of pigs."

Dessie said, " Tom, wouldn't it be ridiculous if we made money, we of all people ? "

" But you made money in Salinas," he said.

" Some—not much. But oh, I was rich in promises. If the bills had ever been paid we wouldn't need pigs. We could go to Paris tomorrow."

" I'm going to drive in and talk to Will," said Tom. He pushed his chair back from the drawing-board. " Want to come with me ? "

" No, I'll stay and make my plans. Tomorrow I start the Great Acorn Contest."

On the ride back to the ranch in the late afternoon Tom was depressed and sad. As always, Will had managed to chew up and spit out his enthusiasm. Will had pulled his lip, rubbed his eyebrows, scratched his nose, cleaned his glasses, and made a major operation of cutting and lighting a cigar. The pig proposition was full of holes, and Will was able to put his finger in the holes.

The Acorn Contest wouldn't work although he was not explicit about why it wouldn't. The whole thing was shaky, particularly in these times. The very best Will was able to do was to agree to think about it.

At one time during the talk Tom had thought to tell Will about Europe, but a quick instinct stopped him. The idea of traipsing around Europe, unless, of course, you were retired and had your capital in good securities, would be to Will a craziness that would make the pig plan a marvel of business acumen. Tom did not tell him, and he left Will to " think it over," knowing that the verdict would be against the pigs and the acorns.

Poor Tom did not know and could not learn that dissembling successfully is one of the creative joys of a business man. To indicate enthusiasm was to be idiotic. And Will really did mean to think it over. Parts of the plan fascinated him. Tom had stumbled on a very interesting thing. If you could buy shoats on credit, fatten them on food that cost next to nothing, sell them, pay off your loan, and take your profit, you had really done something.

Will would not rob his brother. He would cut him in on the profits, but Tom was a dreamer and could not be trusted with a good sound plan. Tom, for instance, didn't even know the price of pork and its probable trend. If it worked out, Will could be depended on to give Tom a very substantial present—maybe even a car. And how about a car as first and only prize for acorns ? Everybody in the whole valley would pick acorns.

Driving up the Hamilton road, Tom wondered how to break it to

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Dessie that their plan was no good. The best way would be to have another plan to substitute for it. How could they make enough money in one year to go to Europe? And suddenly he realized that he didn't know how much they'd need. He didn't know the price of a steamship ticket. They might spend the evening figuring it out.

He half expected Dessie to run out of the house when he drove up. He would put on his best face and tell a joke. But Dessie didn't run out. Maybe taking a nap, he thought. He watered the horses and stabled them and pitched hay into the manger.

Dessie was lying on the goose-neck sofa when Tom came in. "Taking a nap?" he asked, and then he saw the colour of her face. "Dessie," he cried, "what's the matter?"

She rallied herself against pain. "Just a stomach-ache," she said. "A pretty severe one."

"Oh," said Tom. "You scared me. I can fix up a stomach-ache." He went to the kitchen and brought back a glass of pearly liquid. He handed it to her.

"What is it, Tom?"

"Good old-fashioned salts. It may gripe you a little but it'll do the job."

She drank it obediently and made a face. "I remember that taste," she said. "Mother's remedy in green apple season."

"Now you lie still," Tom said. "I'll rustle up some dinner."

She could hear him knocking about in the kitchen. The pain roared through her body. And on top of the pain there was fear. She could feel the medicine burn down to her stomach. After a while she dragged herself to the new home-made flush toilet and tried to vomit the salts. The perspiration ran from her forehead and blinded her. When she tried to straighten up, the muscles over her stomach were set and she could not break free.

Later Tom brought her some scrambled eggs. She shook her head slowly. "I can't," she said, smiling. "I think I'll just go to bed."

"The salts should work pretty soon," Tom assured her. "Then you'll be all right." He helped her to bed. "What do you suppose you ate to cause it?"

Dessie lay in her bedroom and her will battled with the pain. About ten o'clock in the evening her will began to lose its fight. She called, "Tom! Tom!" He opened the door. He had the *World Almanac* in his hand.

"Tom," she said, "I'm sorry. But I'm awfully sick, Tom. I'm terribly sick."

He sat down on the edge of her bed in the half-darkness. "Are the gripes bad?"

"Yes, awful."

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" Can you go to the toilet now ? "

" No, not now."

" I'll bring a lamp and sit with you," he said. " Maybe you can get some sleep. It'll be gone in the morning. The salts will do the job."

Her will took hold again and she lay still while Tom read bits out of the *Almanac* to soothe her. He stopped reading when he thought she was sleeping, and he dozed in his chair beside the lamp.

A thin scream awakened him. He stepped beside the struggling bed-clothes. Dessie's eyes were milky and crazy, like those of a maddened horse. Her mouth corners erupted thick bubbles and her face was on fire.

Tom put his hand under the cover and felt muscles knotted like iron. And then her struggle stopped and her head fell back and the light glinted on her half-closed eyes.

Tom put only a bridle on the horse and flung himself on bare-back. He groped and ripped out his belt to beat the frightened horse to an awkward run over the stony, rutted wheel-track.

The Duncans, asleep upstairs in their two-storey house on the county road, didn't hear the banging on their door, but they heard the bang and the ripping sound as their door front came off, carrying lock and hinges with it. By the time Red Duncan got downstairs with a shot-gun Tom was screaming into the wall telephone at the King City central. " Dr. Tilson ! Get him ! I don't care. Get him ! Get him, goddam it. " Red Duncan sleepily had the gun on him.

Dr. Tilson said, " Yes ! Yes—yes, I hear. You're Tom Hamilton. What's the matter with her ? Is her stomach hard ? What did you do ? Salts ! You goddam fool ! "

Then the doctor controlled his anger. " Tom," he said, " Tom, boy. Pull yourself together. Go back and lay cold cloths—cold as you can get them. I don't suppose you have any ice. Well, keep changing the cloths. I'll be out as fast as I can. Do you hear me ? Tom, do you hear me ? "

He hung the receiver up and dressed. In angry weariness he opened the wall cabinet and collected scalpels and clamps, sponges and tubes of sutures, to put in his bag. He shook his gasoline pressure lantern to make sure it was full and arranged ether can and mask beside it on his bureau. His wife in boudoir cap and night-gown looked in. Dr. Tilson said, " I'm walking over to the garage. Call Will Hamilton. Tell him I want him to drive me to his father's place. If he argues tell him his sister is—dying."

Tom came riding back to the ranch a week after Dessie's funeral,

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riding high and prim, his shoulders straight and chin in, like a guardsman on parade.

Tom had done everything slowly, perfectly. His horse was curried and brushed, and his Stetson hat was square on his head. Not even his father, Samuel Hamilton, could have held himself with more dignity than Tom as he rode back to the old house. A hawk driving down on a chicken with doubled claws did not make him turn his head.

At the barn he dismounted, watered his horse, held him a moment at the door, haltered him, and put rolled barley in the box beside the manger. He took off the saddle and turned the blanket inside out to dry. Then the barley was finished, and he led the bay horse out and turned him free to graze on every unfenced inch of the world.

In the house, the furniture, chairs, and stove seemed to shrink back and away from him in distaste. A stool avoided him as he went to the living-room. His matches were soft and damp, and with a feeling of apology he went to the kitchen for more. The lamp in the living-room was fair and lonely. Tom's first match-flame ran quickly round the Rochester wick and then stood up a full inch of yellow flame.

Tom sat down in the evening and looked around. His eyes avoided the horse-hair sofa. A slight noise of mice in the kitchen made him turn, and he saw his shadow on the wall and his hat was on. He removed it and laid it on the table beside him.

He thought dawdling, protective thoughts, sitting under the lamp, but he knew that pretty soon his name would be called and he would have to go up before the bench with himself as judge and his own crimes as jurors.

And his name *was* called, shrilly in his ears. His mind walked in to face the accusers—Vanity, which charged him with being ill-dressed and dirty and vulgar; and Lust, slipping him the money for his whoring; Dishonesty, to make him pretend to talent and thought he did not have; Laziness and Gluttony arm-in-arm. Tom felt comforted by these because they screened the great Grey One in the back seat, waiting—the grey and dreadful crime.

Tom dredged up lesser things, used small sins almost like virtues to save himself. There were Covetousness of Will's money, Treason toward his mother's God, Theft of time and hope, sick Rejection of love.

Samuel, his father, spoke softly but his voice filled the room. "Be good, be pure, be great, be Tom Hamilton."

Tom ignored his father. He said, "I'm busy greeting my friends," and he nodded to Discourtesy and Ugliness and Unfilial Conduct and Unkempt Finger-nails. Then he started with Vanity

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again. The Grey One shouldered up in front. It was too late to stall with baby sins. This Grey One was Murder.

Tom's hand felt the chill of the glass and saw the pearly liquid with the dissolving crystals still turning over and lucent bubbles rising, and he repeated aloud in the empty, empty room, "This will do the job. Just wait till morning. You'll feel fine then." That's how it had sounded, exactly how, and the walls and chairs and the lamp had all heard it and they could prove it.

There was no place in the whole world for Tom Hamilton to live. But it wasn't for lack of trying. He shuffled possibilities like cards—London? No! Egypt—pyramids in Egypt and the Sphinx. No! Paris? No! Now wait—they do all your sins lots better there. No! Well, stand aside, and maybe we'll come back to you. Bethlehem? Dear God, no! It would be lonely there for a stranger.

It's so hard to remember how you die or when. An eyebrow raised or a whisper—they may be it; or a night mottled with splashed light until powder-driven lead finds your secret and lets out the fluid in you.

Now this is true, Tom Hamilton was dead and he had only to do a few decent things to make it final.

The sofa cricked in criticism, and Tom looked at it and at the smoking lamp to which the sofa referred. "Thank you," Tom said to the sofa. "I hadn't noticed it," and he turned down the wick until the smoking stopped.

His mind dozed. Murder slapped him aware again. Now Red Tom, Gum Tom, was too tired to kill himself. That takes some doing, with maybe pain and maybe hell.

He remembered that his mother, Liza, had a strong distaste for suicide, feeling that it combined three things of which she strongly disapproved—bad manners, cowardice, and sin. It was almost as bad as adultery or stealing—maybe just as bad. There must be a way to avoid Liza's disapproval. She could make one suffer if she disapproved.

Samuel—his father—wouldn't make it hard, but on the other hand you couldn't avoid Samuel because he was in the air every place. Tom had to tell Samuel. He said, "My father, I'm sorry. I can't help it. You over-estimated me. You were wrong. I wish I could justify the love and the pride you squandered on me. Maybe you could find a way out, but I can't. I cannot live. I've killed Dessie and I want to sleep."

And his mind spoke for his absent father, saying, "Why, I can understand how that would be. There are so many patterns to choose from in the arc from birth back to birth again. But let's

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think how we can make it all right with your mother. Why are you so impatient, dear ? "

" I can't wait, that's why," Tom said. " I can't wait any more."

" Why, sure you can, my son, my darling. You're grown great as I knew you would. Open the table-drawer and then make use of that turnip you call your head."

Tom opened the drawer and saw a writing-pad of Linen Lawn and a package of envelopes to match and two gnawed and crippled pencils and, in the dust corner at the back, a few stamps. He took out the pad and sharpened the pencils with his pocket-knife.

He wrote :

Dear Mother,

I hope you keep yourself well. I am going to plan to spend more time with you. Olive asked me for Thanksgiving and you know I'll be there. Our little Olive can cook a turkey nearly to match yours, but I know you will never believe that.

I've had a stroke of good luck. Bought a horse for fifteen dollars—a gelding, and he looks like a blood-horse to me. I got him cheap because he has taken a dislike to mankind. His former owner spent more time on his own back than on the gelding's. I must say he's a pretty cute article.

He's thrown me twice but I'll get him yet, and if I can break him I'll have one of the best horses in the whole county. And you can be sure I'll break him if it takes all winter. I don't know why I go on about him, only the man I bought him from said a funny thing. He said, " That horse is so mean he'd eat a man right off his back."

Well, remember what father used to say when we went rabbit hunting ? " Come back with your shield or on it." I'll see you Thanksgiving.

Your son Tom.

He wondered whether it was good enough, but he was too tired to do it again. He added : *P.S.—I notice that Polly has not reformed one bit. That parrot makes me blush.*

On another sheet he wrote :

Dear Will,

No matter what you yourself may think—please help me now. For mother's sake—please. I was killed by a horse—thrown and kicked in the head—please !

Your brother Tom.

He stamped the letters and put them in his pocket and he asked Samuel, his father, " Is that all right ? "

In his bedroom he broke open a new box of shells and put one of

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them in the cylinder of his well-oiled .38 and he set the loaded chamber one space to the left of the firing-pin.

His horse standing sleepily near the fence came to his whistle and stood drowsing while he saddled up.

It was three o'clock in the morning when he dropped the letters in the post office at King City, and mounted and turned his horse south towards the unproductive hills of the old Hamilton place.

He was a gallant gentleman.

* * *

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

Go to the top of the form if you can name the schoolboys—all well known in fiction—who take part in the adventures indicated below. Count one for the schoolboy, one for the author and one for the title of the book. The total score is twenty-seven. The answers are on page 96.

1. *A pasteboard placard lying on the desk bore the words : " Take care of him. He bites." " Isn't it a dog, Sir ? " " No," says he gravely, " that's not a dog. That's a boy."*
2. *" Now my advice to you, young man . . . is to go straight home to Papa and tell him all about it. I daresay he won't be very hard on you . . . refer him to me if you like. Good-night, my boy."*
3. *They discovered that the Prooshian Bates had an infernal straight eye. " Wasn't it wily of me to ask for the lickin'," said our hero, " instead of those impots ? "*
4. *It was an insult that nothing short of blood could modify. There was no sign of a Goat. No sign of a Feast. Only a disordered bed and on the floor the white, mute tail of a night-shirt.*
5. *Sir Robert suggested they should send all the stuff round to his chambers in the morning. " The boy is plainly innocent. I accept the brief," he said.*
6. *An academic but not an impressive farewell. " Oh, good-bye, . . . You've been a very idle boy "—cough—cough—" I don't think I ever knew such an idle boy before."*
7. *One wag would say there was good news in the paper. " Sugars is ris', my boy." Another would set a sum and inquire if a pound of mutton-candles cost sevenpence-halfpenny, how much the boy must cost ?*
8. *So the race was over ! Everything was over ! He gazed towards the howling mass. " Well bumped, Don Q. ! " cried somebody.*

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TIT FOR TAT

"No one," he said, his eyes twinkling, "can know what a woman will do . . ."

by ROBERT FONTAINE

A BOOK, which a charming lady gave me one Christmas in return for a small mink jacket, contains a list of the plots, hoary with age, that no self-respecting writer would use.

Number Fifty-Two in this book refers to the story of a woman who leaves her husband but discovers, after she has left him a parting note, that the arrangement is impossible.

Be that as it may, I know a fine fellow by the name of Pierre LaFrance, who played the husband's part in this very plot; and I can see no reason why the world should not hear Pierre's story. I, myself, heard it with interest and sympathy, and I am not easily entertained, being of an irritatingly impatient disposition.

Eight years ago Pierre was married to Velma, a doll of a girl with wide blue eyes and the blondest of hair, except at the roots, blank-faced as a telegraph-pole and as full of curves as a plump cherub.

Pierre, on the other hand, was a well-built Frenchman who never wore military heels or waxed his moustache. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word, knowing the good year of every wine and the peculiarities of French provincial cooking. He was slightly grey at the temples, with a pale pleasant face and rather dark eyes, quick to smile.

Pierre was about twenty years older than Velma and everyone predicted their marriage wouldn't last a year. To this *canard* Pierre had a ready answer, which he repeated to me over a Vermouth Cassis on the day before the wedding. "This doll, she is small and beautiful. *Bon bien.* I am big and ugly. We make a good pair. Also, I have money and she has not. How can we not succeed to make a marriage?"

He had me there, hadn't he?

After a year of parties thrice weekly, and another few years of touring the world, spending freely in the gay capitals and drinking generously of the bubbling grape, the LaFrances returned to a modest villa on Long Island, which Mrs. LaFrance had bought secretly as a surprise for Pierre, giving him the key, and the bill, for his forty-sixth birthday, which at the time he referred to as his thirty-ninth.

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For the next two years Velma remembered all special occasions: for their wedding anniversary she gave him the bill and the key to a new and expensive sports model, a four-seater; for his next birthday, the bill for a mink coat (it would, of course, be a joy to Pierre to see his wife look nice); and to celebrate Independence Day on the Fourth of July, she presented him with a summer home, with a swimming pool, a butler, and a small mortgage.

All these gifts Pierre took with good grace and a dwindling bank account. "She is a child with the toys," he explained to me. "Let her play."

"Forgive me, *mon ami*," I said, toying with a diamond-studded cigar lighter which Velma had given Pierre for the anniversary of his coming to America, "but how long will the money last?"

Pierre shrugged. "I will, maybe, go to work." He regarded me carefully to see if there was any encouragement in my eyes.

I smiled. "*Mon vieux*, at your age one does not begin to work."

"I have lost the habit, no doubt," he said, nodding.

He paced about on the lush Oriental rug, thoughtfully, calmly. "I am working on the matter, *comprends*?" he said softly.

I regarded him with surprise.

"A good thing," I said. "When the money is gone, the pretty bird will fly. They pay a high price for honey who lick it from thorns, as your countrymen say."

"She will fly, maybe. *C'est la vie*. I will be sorry after the years of listening to her song." He was thoughtful, perhaps even wistful.

"You love her, of course."

"Is it hard to love one so young and beautiful? It goes without saying. So many love her."

"So many. Yes," I said thoughtfully.

What happened afterwards can be told quickly.

Three weeks later Velma began to act mysteriously. She was furtive, nervous and likely to throw childish fits of petulance at the slightest provocation.

"The bird will fly," I warned Pierre sadly, after one of Velma's outbursts.

"One can see it," he said. "I must wait, though. In her heart she thinks she wishes something else. Maybe when the time comes she will change her mind. No? *C'est possible*."

"Everything is possible," I said, "including honest government. But one does not look for such things."

A week later Pierre rang me up and asked me to hurry over to his home.

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I was there in an hour. He was standing in his study, holding in his hand a scented piece of violet note-paper bearing the family crest—three fledgling robins waiting to be fed, *clamant* on a field of azure—a crest he had invented for himself.

He was calm, strong, smiling gently the smile of older wisdom and perhaps mild cynicism.

I read the note, which he said had been slipped half-way under his door sometime during the day. It said simply that Velma had stopped loving Pierre, that a younger man had entered her life, a man more her own age and the owner of a prosperous chain of corset shops. All her love, alas, was now for him. Pierre should not try to see her and should forgive her.

"The style," I commented, "is a little florid for one so young."

"Possibly he helped her."

"In that case," I suggested, "this strange lover is a donkey and she will soon tire of him."

Pierre chuckled mysteriously. "What a pity love is so puzzling, eh?"

"That is also its charm," I said.

He smiled as if he had scarcely heard me and went to the door, folded the note into the envelope and slipped it back where it had been.

Then he excused himself, saying he had to telephone. Ten minutes passed during which I smoked one of his imported cigars and drank a small glass of very dry sherry. When he returned he was quite gay, rubbing his hands together, chuckling, and singing the French folk song, *Auprès de ma blonde.*

I asked him nothing. He drank two sherries and then grinned boyishly at me.

"I leave the note where it was. Does she come back, she will grasp the note, tear it in a thousand pieces and say, 'Pierre, I adore you.' Then she will wait to see if really I have read the note."

"And after this?"

"*Sais pas.*"

"You don't know? You don't know even if she will come back. Why should she?"

He laughed. "Because she is a woman."

We went downstairs and played chess until dawn. As we were about to begin a final game, Velma rushed in, dashed up the stairs without a greeting and then, five minutes later, was down again, throwing her arms round Pierre and swearing everlasting love. Moving away from him she regarded him as he had said she would.

Pierre was the same as ever. It was as if the note had never existed.

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Then Velma sat on the arm of his chair and watched quietly while we finished the chess.

It was a month before my curiosity forced me to ask Pierre how he had known she would come back, and what had made her come back.

"I did not know," he said, his dark eyes twinkling. "No one can know what a woman will do. But I suspected she might become confused. *Voilà!*

"I telephoned my dear friend the Duchess of Laforet and explained to her that as my dearest friend and one who could be trusted, of a certainty, to keep a secret, I wished to let her know first that I was leaving my wife for the Countess of Châteaurien. Ah, well, do you know the Duchess? No, eh? In ten minutes her entire circle of friends knew about it.

"I thought it was possible that Velma's lover would know one of these friends or maybe that Velma herself would phone the Duchess. As it happened the Duchess knew of Velma's defection, as I discovered later, and promptly rang her up at the apartment of her lover."

"But still," I said, somewhat dazzled by this intricate grapevine of society, "why would that stop Velma?"

"Why? But how simple! Because she is a very jealous woman."

* * *

LIGHT READING!

Shall I ever forget taking luncheon at the Bishop's Palace at Wells? Wells has a certain *air de famille* with Bruges. It is beautiful, contemplative, sunk in its lilied past; it has a clerical atmosphere; not the atmosphere of the Cathedral Close, but something slightly foreign, dissonant.

During the war, it was alleged that the Palace was waited upon by domesticated swans, who answered the bell, went to market with a basket in their beaks.

One pictured the advertisement in the "wanted" column of the local newpaper: "Swan reliable, honest, sober, good with children, no followers."

Would Leda, one wondered, have ranked as a follower?

"And what, Bishop," inquired my mother, striving to breach a lacuna in the conversation, "are your favourite books?"

"Well," replied His Lordship, "my idea of a perfect afternoon is to relax on that sofa with my favourite Trollope."

VIOLET TREFUSIS, *Don't Look Round*

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MANEATER

Perhaps it was a coincidence . . . but this was a real lion all right

by ALASTAIR SCOBIE

THE first victim was old Kenanjui. He was something of a character amongst the WaOlo headmen. He'd been at a beer-drinking session at Ololoi, and returning home happily drunk just before midnight, he was caught and killed where the dry bed of the Oblani River snakes out of the thorn forest under the escarpment.

His grandson, M'Kingi, found him, or what little there was of him, and identified the remains by his grandfather's antelope-horn snuff-box, which was one of the old man's ornaments. Usually he kept the box in the lobe of his distended ear. There was no great mystery, for the pug marks led off into the bush and Kenanjui's footprints showed that he had tried to run. To run from a lion is tantamount to committing suicide.

When the lion took Omigu, he was grazing his father's cattle beneath the large *baobab* tree near Kenanjui's kraal. Omigu had put up a fight; he was nearly twelve and very strong, and there was a little blood on his hunting knife when they found it. The pug marks went off into the thorn forest and were lost on the rocky bed of the Oblani. M'Kingi mourned again, for the lion's second victim in three days was his cousin.

That night people in Kenanjui's village barred their doors and lay awake listening to the lions roaring out on the plains. It was a familiar sound, but there were times when it could be menacing. The reign of terror had begun.

Next morning when the sun was clear of the trees and the lions should have been asleep in the long grass under the acacia thorn, M'Kingi's intended wife Pomeza went out to put three pots of beer behind her hut to cool, and no man even heard her cry. They found her bangles and neck ring in the bush, and M'Kingi swore a terrible oath on the sacred tree to kill the lion or die for it.

A party of spearmen danced themselves into a hypnotic frenzy and went off into the thorn forest with staring eyes and froth on their lips, and on the third day they found a big lion asleep on a rock near Migela. They closed in with stabbing spears and after a

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bloody battle, in which one man was killed and another badly clawed on the thigh, they returned triumphant. M'Kingi entered the village draped in the dripping skin, only to find that his uncle, Kipzidi, had been taken that morning and done to death not a hundred yards from the village, whilst the women and children barred themselves in their huts and tried not to hear what was going on out there behind their thorn *boma*.

Charles Delafrayne Cowper, M.C., Game Ranger of the WaOli National Park, that great stretch of territory dedicated to big game that stretches from the foothills of Kilimanjaro to the Oblani River, stooped over something that lay in the shadow of a twisted rock. Stephen Camden, his assistant, watched him impatiently, and beyond them a ring of chattering WaOlo tribesmen leaned on their long spears and shouted occasional advice to the Ranger.

Cowper was grey-haired, tall and powerful, differing from the skinny WaOlo as a prize Guernsey bull differs from their hump-backed scrub cattle. Steve Camden was young and over-anxious. He badly wanted to kill a man-eater because it would give him professional standing in the big game world. A nice band of lion-tail round the brim of your *terai* was a good advertisment, and when one of those pretty American tourists asked you about it you could answer, nonchalantly, " Man-eater I shot last spring. Killed five coons in ten days before I bagged him." But Camden was afraid the Ranger would insist on bagging this brute—Cowper always claimed the limelight, he thought, and made his assistant's " inexperience " a reason for doing so.

" Typical kill," said Cowper, straightening. " Look at the pug marks. Jumped him from behind that bush. Probably been stalking each other for hours."

Camden shuddered, looking at the thing under the rock.

" What was the name of this man ? " Cowper called to the WaOlo.

" M'Kingi, *Bwana !* " An old headman came forward talking with dramatic gestures, explaining something to Cowper in his clicking, jaw-twisting language.

" Get that ? " Cowper asked his assistant, when the old man finished.

" Bits only. It's what they always say—the lion was the spirit of a witch doctor, or some such."

Cowper shook his head. " Not a witch doctor, old boy, a sorcerer."

" Same thing, aren't they ? "

" One serves God and the other the devil. Opposites." He leaned again over the body of M'Kingi. " But this is a real lion, all right."

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Steve grinned. " What did you expect, sir ? A spirit lion ? "

Cowper replied seriously, " All the victims have been members of the same family. Could be coincidence—most of these people are related—but have you ever heard of the Lion Men ? "

" Lion Men ! " Camden was faintly annoyed. He had forgotten about the Lion Men.

Even in this twentieth century when all mysteries are explained and card-indexed, very little is known of the Lion Men of Tanganyika.

In African magic they play the part of Satan worshippers in a Christian community. They don lion skins and stalk by night, and they kill with steel claws fashioned like those of a lion. The natives believe that the lion men actually change into beasts, but some white men have a theory that lion men are idiots, trained from childhood to believe they are lions, and hidden by the sorcerers until they are needed.

Cowper did not believe in this theory. In the first place, the Lion Men's raids were sporadic. For years they would be quiescent, then an orgy of killing would break out in some village far from the roads. The outbreak would die down, and nothing might be heard of the Lion Men for years.

No white man has ever seen a Lion Man in his regalia. The nearest Cowper himself had come to seeing one was on a night fifteen years before, when he had been chasing them near this very village, and had found a skin discarded, still warm from its human wearer.

But M'Kingi had been killed by a lion ; and there was no doubt of it.

" What made you think of Lion Men ? " Camden asked. " We don't have that sort of trouble around here, thank God."

" No," Cowper told him, " but we used to. And Wani was killed ten days ago . . . "

" Wani ? "

" It's quite an interesting story, Steve. But we ought to get some sleep ; it's going to be a busy night."

When the moon edged up over the thorn forest, Cowper lay full-length on his stomach in a narrow pit screened by brush, down-wind from the body of M'Kingi. His rifle was in the " sleeping " position, ready to snap up in a moment, as he watched the thorn scrub for the gleam of eyes or the silent movement of a hunting lion.

Steve was above, on top of the twisted rock, with his cherished .450 across his knees. Cowper didn't like double-barrelled rifles :

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they allowed too little margin for error; but he had decided to let his assistant take the first shot. Do his ego good to shoot a man-eater, get rid of some of the boy's sulkiness. For himself, Cowper simply wished the hunt was over, so that he could enjoy a pipe of tobacco.

Cowper thought Steve would never quite understand the story of Wani, because he did not understand Africans. Of course he would, in time, given patience.

Wani had been old even fifteen years before, but strong as an ox. A big man for a WaOlo and a feared sorcerer. Wani had three wives and he used them for stirring up trouble by gossip and by what we would call "poison-pen" tactics. Wani's wives were always his stalking horses; he would send them out to start mischief or to find the truth of a situation before he moved, for Wani made his living by mischief. Hatred was his bread-and-butter, for only where hatred lived was a sorcerer called for. He would curse an enemy or another village and he would be well paid for his work.

Wani had asked Kenanjui for permission to marry his daughter, Mela, but Kenanjui had refused and she had gone instead to Chizende, a sub-chief, as his second wife. Two days after the marriage Mela had been taken by Lion Men, and Lion Men had previously been unheard of in the territory. The next night Chizende had foolishly kept an appointment with an unknown man in the forest and had never been seen again. The District Commissioner of those days had arrested Wani and charged him with murder, but when he went for trial in Arusha he had been defended by a smart Sikh lawyer and discharged on a technicality. It was, in fact, a typical ritual murder case.

Fifteen years had passed quietly by, whilst Wani got rich on mischief. And then, ten days before Kenanjui was killed, a young warrior had left the initiation hut, entitled to carry the lion spear and wear the maned head-dress, with all childish things put behind him. He was M'Kingi, son of Chizende by his first wife, and on the very night of his initiation, Wani had been found with a spear wound between his shoulder blades . . .

Since then M'Kingi and four members of his family had been killed by a man-eater. A strange coincidence, to say the least.

Of course Wani had powerful friends—but not as powerful, Cowper thought, as the great beast that had dragged M'Kingi into the shade of the twisted rock. Or else there was more to the Lion Men than a skin and a set of steel claws.

Cowper lay cramped in his pit, with that tingling sensation he always got on these long night waits for a beast. He no longer seemed to be watching the forest; the forest had now begun to

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watch him. Suddenly he became wide awake. Every muscle relaxed except for his right hand, and all his being concentrated on the trigger-finger. The rifle sling was tight on his upper arm, and the long barrel of the Mannlicher projected from the firm cradle of his left hand.

Then there was the slight stir of a branch, and a tawny back slid through the shaft of moonlight. It was immediately lost again in shadow.

"Come out, pretty pussy," Cowper said under his breath. "Come into the moonlight and let's have a look at you . . ."

Beneath a thorn tree there was the switch of a tufted tail. Cowper put his eye to his sights and waited. His mind was willing the beast into the moonlight; time was on his side. He could wait . . .

Then Cowper started as the night was torn by the roar of Steve's .450. Both barrels sent long orange tongues of flame into the night and in the singing silence that followed Cowper could see a kicking shape under the thorn trees, a shape that suddenly lay still. Cowper swore—would Steve ever learn the value of patience? Cautiously Cowper rose to his feet, his gun trained on the silent yellow thing that lay in the moonlight.

Foot by foot he went forward . . .

"I got him!" Steve's exultant voice hissed in his ear.

"Her," said Cowper quietly, "you got her." He felt for his big torch and threw a yellow beam on to the silent figure in the grass. "A young lioness, my friend. No man-eater."

"I'm damned sorry, Charles . . ."

"Re-load your gun or you may be sorrier—you're not at Bisley now."

Steve flushed, ejecting the empty shells from the breech and pushing home two more of his huge bullets. Cowper looked down at the lioness. He was thinking, despite himself, of Wani's habit of using his wives to search out the land for him.

"Not big enough by half," he said, disgustedly.

Again Steve muttered he was sorry.

"Oh, don't mind me snapping. A man only learns by his mistakes. If you live long enough you'll be a good hunter." Steve mumbled some thanks.

"Remember," Cowper told him, "a man-eater usually gets that way because he's too old to hunt his usual food, or because he's been crippled or wounded. Either way he draws on some reserve of cunning and courage—he's ten times as cunning as a normal lion. So don't shoot until you have him plain in your sights."

He worked the bolt of the Mannlicher. "Let's go," he said. "Every lion within ten miles is running after that row your pop-gun made."

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Cowper switched off the torch, glanced into the thorn forest and froze. Steve wouldn't see it—it took long years of training to spot a thing like that. Fifty yards away the moonlight fell on a tiny shape in the thicket. He recognized it because he knew the shape of a lion's face, like a clumsy skull cut by a child from yellow felt. Round it the black mane merged into the darkness of the night.

He closed his eyes in case the moonlight was playing him tricks, opened them, and the skull had vanished. Cowper was thinking of Wani, of the blood-shot old eyes and the necklace of vertebrae round the thick black neck, of the lion-claw charms that dangled from the bracelets on the powerful arms.

In the thorn forest nothing moved, and there was silence but for the croak of frogs in the pools.

"No, you don't, damn you!" One tawny flash and Cowper had his rifle to his shoulder, working the bolt like a madman, hardly feeling the shock of the recoil. From the thorn forest came the coughing roar of a wounded lion, and forgetting his own doctrine of caution and patience, Cowper was running forward, cramming bullets into his empty magazine.

There was blood, frothy lung blood, on the grass—that was real enough!

The blood-spoor led to a tangled patch of thorn on the right and Cowper dropped to one knee, his eyes searching every branch and patch of darkness for the skull face and the black mane, waiting for a charge.

Then he heard a sudden noise behind him and to his left, a wicked purring growl, and he spun round, knowing he had been tricked—the lion had doubled back and was coming up from behind. He jerked up his rifle as the huge, yellow shape hurtled from covert. He was too late . . . Cowper caught the filthy smell of a big, carnivorous beast, and then, for the second time that night, but now as from a thousand miles away, came the splintering roar of Steve's heavy double.

The lion twisted round in his charge as the two bone-smashing bullets caught him, spun a second like a crazy teetotum under the impact, kicked and lay still.

Cowper got shakily to his feet.

Steve was examining the lion.

"This is your man-eater," he said. "No spirit lion about him. He's eleven feet if he's an inch."

"That was damned good shooting," Cowper said.

"Not bad. Incidentally, I'm shaking like a leaf!" Steve held out his hand to show his trembling fingers.

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"Me too!" Cowper walked over, looked down at the huge, black-maned brute with the blood still trickling from the wound in his skull.

"You were right about him being wounded," Steve said, trying to turn the big carcase over. "He's got a spear-wound right between his shoulder-blades."

"Has he?" Cowper kept his voice steady with an effort. "An old wound?"

"Mmm. Not more than a fortnight old. See for yourself. Some of your blessed WaOlo after a headdress, I suppose."

Cowper leaned against a tree, wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Yes," he said, "I suppose that would be it."

* * *

CHRISTMAS FOR THE POOR TRAVELLERS

I went back to my inn to give the necessary directions for the Turkey and Roast Beef, and during the remainder of the day, could settle to nothing for thinking of the poor Travellers.

After the Cathedral bell had struck eight, I could smell a delicious savour of Turkey and Roast Beef rising to the window of my adjoining bedroom, which looked down into the inn-yard just where the lights of the kitchen reddened a massive fragment of the Castle wall. It was high time to make the Wassail now; therefore I had up the materials (which, together with their proportions and combinations, I must decline to impart, as the only secret of my own I was ever known to keep), and made a glorious jorum . . . It being now upon the stroke of nine, I set out for Watts's Charity, carrying my brown beauty in my arms.

The Travellers were all assembled, the cloth was laid. I never saw a finer turkey, finer beef, or greater prodigality of sauce and gravy; and my Travellers did wonderful justice to everything set before them. It made my heart rejoice to observe how their wind and frost hardened faces softened in the clatter of plates and knives and forks, and mellowed in the fire and supper heat.

When supper was done, my brown beauty had been elevated on the table . . . this was the time for bringing the poker to bear on the billet of wood. I tapped it three times, like an enchanted talisman, and a brilliant host of merrymakers burst out of it, and sported off by the chimney,—rushing up the middle in a fiery country dance, and never coming down again. Meanwhile, by their sparkling light, which threw our lamp into the shade, I filled the glasses, and gave my Travellers, CHRISTMAS!

CHARLES DICKENS, *Christmas Stories*

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INVITATION

Who e'er she be,
That not impossible she
That shall command my heart and me

RICHARD CRASHAW

He renewed his offer of marriage on an average once in three months, but in such a way as to afford no excuse for an outbreak of temperament on either side. One First of April, the question had arrived from Paris in a single Latin sentence, starting off dispiritedly, " Num . . . ? "—a particle which notoriously " expects the answer No."

Harriet, rummaging the Grammar book for " polite negatives," replied, still more briefly, " Benigne."

DOROTHY L. SAYERS, *Gaudy Night*

Pastures New

All day my sheep have mingled with yours. They strayed
Into your valley seeking a change of ground.
Held and bemused with what they and I had found,
Pastures and wonders, heedlessly I delayed.

Now it is late. The tracks leading home are steep,
The stars and landmarks of your country are strange.
How can I take my sheep back over the range?
Shepherdess, show me now where I may sleep.

NORMAN CAMERON

I Fear Thy Kisses . . .

Alexander was a prince of great power, and a disciple of Aristotle, who instructed him in every branch of polite learning. The Queen of the North, having heard of his proficiency, nourished her daughter from the cradle upon a certain kind of deadly poison ; and, when she grew up, she was considered so beautiful that the sight of her alone affected many with madness. The Queen sent her to Alexander to espouse. He had no sooner beheld her than he became violently enamoured, and with much eagerness desired to possess her ; but Aristotle observing his weakness, said : " Do not touch her, for if you do you will certainly perish. She has been nurtured on the most deleterious food, which I will prove to you immediately. Here is a malefactor who is already condemned to death. He shall

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be united to her, and you will soon see the truth of what I advance." Accordingly the culprit was brought without delay to the girl; and scarcely had he touched her lips, before his whole frame was impregnated with poison, and he expired in the greatest agony. Alexander, glad at his escape from such imminent destruction, bestowed all thanks on his instructor, and returned the girl to her mother.

From *Gesta Romanorum* translated by *Charles Swan*

False Knight

Clark Colven and his gay ladie,
As they walked to yon garden greene,
A belt about her middle gimp,
Which cost Clark Colven crowns fifteen :

" O hearken weel now, my good lord,
O hearken weel to what I say ;
When ye gang to the wall o Stream,
O gang nae neer the well-fared may."

" O haud your tongue, my gay ladie,
Tak nae sic care o me ;
For I nae saw a fair woman
I like so well as thee."

He mounted on his berry-brown steed,
And merry, merry rade he on,
Till he came to the wall o Stream,
And there he saw the mermaiden.

" Ye wash, ye wash, ye bonny may,
And ay's ye wash your sark o silk :"
" It's a' for you, ye gentle knight,
My skin is whiter than the milk."

He's taen her by the milk-white hand,
He's taen her by the sleeve sae green,
And he's forgotten his gay ladie,
And away with the fair maiden.

Traditional Ballad

Sweet Morsel

A wife with a strawberry breath, cherry lips, apricot cheeks, and a soft velvet head like a melicotton.

BEN JONSON

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Allegory

I lost my way in the open field
Where a lovely girl was gathering
Violets under the smiling sun ;
And I asked her to guide me home . . .
She nodded and pointed the way with her flowers
Towards a spot where two gay butterflies
Leisurely fluttered in the azure.

GONNOSKÉ KOMAI, *Fuji-Yama and Other Poems*

All's Fair

The air . . . of Abydos is undoubtedly very amorous, since that soft passion betrayed the castle into the hands of the Turks . . . The governor's daughter, imagining to have seen her future husband in a dream, fancied she afterwards saw the dear figure in the form of one of her besiegers ; and, being willing to obey her destiny, tossed a note to him over the wall, with the offer of her person and the delivery of the castle. He shewed it to his general, who consented to try the sincerity of her intentions, and withdrew his army, ordering the young man to return with a select body of men at midnight. She admitted him at the appointed hour ; he destroyed the garrison, took her father prisoner, and made her his wife.

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU,
Letters, July 31st, 1718

The Captive Heart

Man, coming first to woman
And finding her fair
Might, looking in her eyes, discover
How soon he will despair
Of finding that way back again
From her enchanted lair,
Made captive by such simple things
As eyes, as lips, as hair.

JOHN SMITH, *The Dark Side of Love*

To Winne Women

And if you want medicines to winne women, I have yet more, the lungs of a *Vultur*, the ashes of *Stellio*, the left stone of a cocke, the tongue of a goose, the brayne of a cat, the last hair of a wolve's tail. Things easie to be hadde, and commonly practised.

JOHN LYLY, 1554–1606

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TOKEN OF LOVE

"It isn't much," she said, "just a little thing you can unwrap on Christmas morning"

by MICHAEL FOSTER

IT was late, after midnight, when I left the theatre. The corridor of dressing-rooms was empty. All the other people had gone, either home or to join late parties around town. On the dusty concrete stairs one of the girls, hurrying, had dropped a flower. Old Nod the door-keeper was still there, and he got up from his squeaky wooden rocking-chair to open the stage door for me. His Christmas packages from members of the company were already beginning to be stacked up on display along the shelf under the notice-board. The day after tomorrow would be Christmas Eve.

"Goodnight, Mr. Wade," he said. "And thanks for the present."

"Hope you like it when you unwrap it," I said. I hadn't the faintest idea which of the bright packages was supposed to be from me. I had asked Susan to do my shopping, along with her own.

"We're planning quite a day at our house, Christmas Day—the wife and I," said old Nod earnestly.

"That's good," I said. "Fine."

Outside a gritty, freezing wind was blowing, out of the night of the city. If there is any place in Manhattan where ghosts could comfortably gather on a winter's night, it is an old theatrical alley in the West Forties. Time is there, if you listen—the echoes of names and laughter, and footsteps from the crowded long-ago.

With my overcoat collar turned up, I walked slowly along beside the age-sooted brick wall of the theatre under the fire-escapes which faded up into the blackness of the sky. It was starting to snow a little, hard gusts of sleety grey which stung your face. When I reached the street, the pavements were deserted. There was nobody else in sight in either direction. Some torn pieces of paper had already blown into the entrance of the theatre, and the whole front was dark; but there, overhead, were our names in glass block letters: Susan Markley and John Wade in *English Spoken Here*. The notices had described it as "That bitter and brittle modern comedy which is doing so much for us all this winter." It's an odd feeling, sufficiently odd and disillusioning, to see your name there when the lights are

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turned off. It looks awfully blank. But it was there, and I had lost everything else in the world to put it there.

A starved but sinful cat came prowling along underneath the unlighted signs, not walking as fast as the snow-scurries which blew ahead of him on the bare grey pavement. In the steamy, lighted window of a tavern across the street, a Christmas wreath was hanging; and you could hear a muffled monotony of voices and foolish laughter, as if from very far away. Even those people of the squalid night were beginning to celebrate, however unknowingly, the humble birth-night of a Child whom even the wisest or the saddest of us do not know enough about.

I walked towards the distant avenue where I knew I would be able to pick up a late-cruising taxi. The less I let myself think, the better for me. Susan is one of the shining ones of this earth; she and her husband—a thoroughly nice fellow—had asked me to spend Christmas with them in their flat overlooking Central Park. But they knew about Cathleen, and so they did not insist when I said—"No thank you. Please not this year." The invitations from other people, party people, were harder to get out of, but I don't think I offended anybody.

On the avenue I signalled a taxi and when I got home to the hotel where I live I found that some more presents had arrived. Bell-boys had brought them up and arranged them on a side-table in my sitting-room. In the soft light they were a rich, blurred mass of golds and greens and cellophane-glitter in expensive-looking shapes. I didn't look at any of the cards. Not yet. They would all be courtesies from other names of the stage or of Hollywood or radio, the lavish worldly gifts. I stood there looking at them, and I was alone.

The first time I ever saw Cathleen—that was just before Christmas, too. Eight years ago. It was about three o'clock one afternoon, in a second-rate casting office. We were both turned away at the same time, this girl and I. We didn't even manage to see the agent. A tired blonde just looked up from her typewriter: "Nothing today, Mr. Kron says. He says, maybe after the first of the year." The casting office was on the second floor of a decaying old building. So we found ourselves going back down the stairs together, this slender dark girl and I.

There was a soft snow falling, veiling all the towers of the city, and we walked along Broadway, with the crowds and the traffic. She had on a belted polo coat, a little shabby, and she walked with her hands thrust deep into its pockets. Her lips were shy and merry, but her eyes were very steady when she looked at you, and clear with shining courage.

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Over Manhattan it was a country sort of snow that afternoon, the kind of snow you remember from when you were a child ; she was from a little town in Montana, and I from a Kansas farm. A thousand miles from each other, in fiercely dreaming youth we had each walked alone and looked up at the same country stars and been shaken with passion for the cities of the world, for the powerful sonorous magic of the theatre, for Broadway. So here we were. Talking to each other at first hesitantly, almost timidly ; but what we said I can't remember, much. I wish I could.

We went into a drug store where in those days hungry, hopeful young actors used to hang around endlessly—" I hear Libekind is casting next week . . ." " I got a tip on a road show that's going out next month . . ." Cathleen and I sat up at the counter for a cup of coffee apiece. One of her gloves, I saw when she laid them down, was carefully mended at a finger-tip. The wetness of the snow had soaked in through the thin-worn soles of my shoes, which I kept tucked back out of sight under the tall soda-fountain stool. But we were young, and our hearts were high. Wherever she is, she must be remembering that, too.

And the first Christmas after we were married—we were living in a furnished room on West 15th Street. The first-floor front, in one of those ancient red brick houses. In front of our windows, left over from better days of the house, was a useless little ornamental iron-work balcony, and again there was snow on the New York streets. The wrought-iron railing bore a lace-work pattern of snow, and I remember her, my own Cathleen, in the dusk of Christmas Eve walking across the worn red carpet to stand there at the windows, watching the lights coming on in the purple-grey. We had both been in summer shows in New England. I was now out of a job again, but she was getting an occasional hour as a model. She was so beautiful, so very beautiful and still so believing.

On Christmas morning she woke me up early, making coffee on our electric plate. We had a few little gifts for each other, such small things as we could afford. But the greatest gift in the world was still the invisible one. When she tried to say " Merry Christmas, d-darling—" I remember she stopped, and swallowed, and was silent. Her rumpled dark hair ; and her eyes—her eyes were like flowers.

Our other Christmasses. There was one on the road, in a hotel in a small town in Oregon, and it was raining. The grey endless rain of the coast. It was a travel-worn road company we were in, not very good, but it was the first year I had ever had a pay-day at Christmas. It was the first time I was ever able to give her a really extravagant present. I remember my girl standing in the grey morning light in that hotel room, with a fur coat on over her pyjamas—and

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crying with an absolutely motionless face while she looked at me.

And after that year, the gifts could always be extravagant and the fur coat real mink, and the diamonds real as well. Because when we got back to New York, that strange play, *The Wishing Cap*, was being cast with unknown actors and actresses for a cheap production. When it hit, astonishing everybody, I hit with it. After the first roaring week of success, my name was in lights right above the theatre entrance, and the play ran for nearly two years.

We had a big apartment, Cathleen and I, on two floors with an elegant stairway between, and in the Christmas season it was always filled with people, coming and going. You would meet people on the stairs who were practically strangers—but everyone was so gay, so festive! Once in a while some blockhead of a woman would say something like: "So this is Mrs. Wade. And are you interested in the theatre?" I never knew how great a lady my wife was until I saw her smile and murmur a polite reply after a remark like that.

Looking back, I can see now, in retrospect, her quiet pain and her increasing shadow-like loneliness, as year followed year and, for *me*, play followed play. But, at the time, I was too busy to notice. You have to be hard and clever when you are coming up in this most merciless of all professions; or, maybe, it's only that you fall into the attitude of being hard and clever, because everybody else is pretending to be. Somehow, we never seemed to be together again, wholly, deeply, as we had always been when we were poor.

They were hurried years, and desperately intense: I know that we must have had afternoons, at home, alone; but it seems to me that we were always coming in very late at night from somewhere and getting out of our party clothes, too filled with other people's talk to say much to each other. Or else, at noon breakfasts, I was preoccupied, with one eye on the clock, while I ripped through the morning's letters, because I had an appointment with somebody for some reason.

Cathleen never complained, even by her silence, and she was always proud when some new good break came my way. But I can remember the white, still face she lifted to me every night at the front door when I was leaving for the theatre. Once in a while she would be working too, a minor part in some other theatre—she would never take a small part in one of my plays. For that I don't blame her. I know now that I was watching goodness and bravery. She was hard-working and tired and beautiful. And somewhere along the way I lost my girl, my own Cathleen.

But there is one thing that I'm thankful for now. Through those years when I was failing her, she had one friend. I believe that

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Cathleen and Margot Kelly met in some unremembered short-lived play or other, in which they both had parts. I can't quite place just when or where it was, but I think they shared a stuffy, littered dressing-room with two other girls. Dimly, I can recall their joking about how untidy the other two girls were. Anyway, Margot began to be in our flat quite a lot. They chummed around for lunches and afternoon shopping, and I was glad because it gave Cathleen company and somebody to talk to while I was busy. Besides, I liked Margot. For a long time, two or three years, she was practically like a sister to us both: a big, startling-looking blonde, deceptively luscious. Deceptively, because she was tough and theatre-wise.

One Christmas afternoon when she came in, Cathleen showed her the array of grand presents I had given her, and at last she held out silently in her open hand the keys to the new sports roadster which stood glittering in the pale winter sunshine in front of the entrance to the flats, six storeys below. Margot had seen it, coming in—in fact, I had told her about it a month ago when I had ordered it for Cathleen. At the sight of the keys in that open hand, she started to make the usual and expected thrilled noises—and then stopped. Because Cathleen did a strange thing.

Gently, she laid the keys on the table and, for no reason that I could imagine, walked out of the room. I heard her going up the stairs, I heard the door of her room click softly closed. And Margot gave a strange, long glance towards those keys on the table.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"I guess it's a usual sort of story, John," she said slowly. "I won't argue with you."

It left me vaguely disturbed, but only for a little while. Something else happened, the doorbell rang, somebody else came in, I sent the maid to tell Cathleen; and I forgot.

When Cathleen left me, that next January, she said:

"I'd always come back to the man I knew. For that man I would go hungry. I expected to, when I married him. For him I would scrub floors, I would go in rags, because he was gentle and he had a simple heart. But he's gone, he's gone. He left a long time ago, little by little. So now it's time for me to leave."

I guess I was so bewildered and angry, making such a scene of outraged pride, that I did not understand what she was trying to say to me. She was not angry; she was talking almost in whispers.

"Of course," she said. "You've been *proud* to do everything in the world for me—except remain the man I loved. Your gifts have been stupendous, and thoughtless. I'd rather have a bag of popcorn, bought with your last dime. Do you remember the time you did that, and we ate it together walking along a rainy street?

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For all your vainglory, successful men like you are a dime a dozen. But I remember the little gentle ways of a man who had nothing."

Well, so she was gone. I know that she stayed with Margot for a while, and I kept expecting her to come back so I did not ring up. Then I heard that she had gone on tour with a travelling company, but I still kept expecting her to come back, some day. I didn't know her, after all. The next I heard, a year later, she was in Australia, in a touring repertory company. And then it was too late, because she had changed her name, and I could not trace her through any booking agency. So she was really gone, and she meant it.

That was why, the other night, I turned away sick in my soul from the gorgeous, the impersonal professional Christmas packages on my table, and went around my hotel sitting-room switching on all the lights. The shadows were bothering me.

I went to the telephone and ordered my late supper to be sent up. And it was when I was standing there in the glare of lights, that I realized I had already decided to go and see Margot Kelly. For old times' sake, I thought, because it was near Christmas.

I knew she was back in town, because last October I had received a note from her. I hadn't paid any attention to it at the time, beyond perhaps a moment of grim amusement, because I had been busy on the evening when I found it in my dressing-room at the theatre. Now, rooting around in my hotel writing-desk, I found it again. "... just back and resting from successful tour of the Middle West. See you are still doing great things, John. Old remembrances and congratulations. Yours sincerely, Margot." The note gave a remote Brooklyn address, but no telephone number. Maybe she hadn't wanted me to call her.

The next afternoon I set out for Brooklyn. I didn't bother to shave—I could stop in a barber's shop on my way to the theatre later on. From motives of tact which were perhaps unnecessary and a bit overdone, I wore an old belted raincoat and a hat, comfortably battered from my last two summer holidays which I had spent fishing. I didn't look exactly trampish, but I was not sartorially flaunting my prosperity before Margot's cynical eyes, either.

It was a longish way, and the address she had given was a grimy old brick apartment house in a dismal street. Her name was there—No. 3-A—and I climbed three flights of creaking stairs to knock on her door. I heard her heavy firm step, and the door opened. She had on a grey flannel wrapper with a couple of careless cigarette-holes burned in it, and her extremely golden hair was twisted up on top of her head; but she was as big and beautiful as ever.

"Oh!" she said. Then she held out her hand. "Hi, John. Come in."

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She only had one room and we stood awkwardly in the middle of it, smiling uncertainly at each other. I don't think we actually said, "Well, well!" in too-hearty voices; Margot murmured, "This is a surprise, John," and I said, "Why, you're looking grand!"

"To hell with the old theatrical amenities," Margot exclaimed abruptly. "I'll get you a cup of tea, or a gin. What do you want?"

"Coffee," I said. "I'm working tonight."

"I know you are. I haven't had a chance to see your show yet, but I hear you're better than ever. You and Markley," she said. "Somebody was telling me that you're working more quietly than you used to, and that it's better."

"Thanks," I said. "But it's mostly Susan. She's marvellous to work with."

Margot went over to a gas-ring in the corner and put on a percolator of water and coffee. She struck a match for the gas, blew it out with a long look at me, and then with magnificent aplomb retired behind a shabby folding screen which was set up in another corner of the room. I heard her sling her wrapper aside, and pretty soon I could tell she was getting into her girdle. I could hear her take a deep, resolute breath as she hauled it up over her munificent and probably ivory-beautiful body. Then there were rustlings, as she took a slip and some clothes off coat-hangers in the corner.

"Listen, Margot," I said. "How would you like to see our show tonight? I can't get seats for you and the boy-friend, if any, because we're sold out for weeks ahead. But I'd like to have you in the wings, watching us tonight. As my guest."

"It would be wonderful," she said. "I'd like to see you work, John. Besides, it's probably the last chance I'll ever have to set my big foot on a New York stage. Even just standing in the wings, I'd like it, once more. I don't fool myself any more, John. Thanks, and it's sweet of you."

Margot came out from behind the screen, dressed to the teeth. She had on a hostess gown, with long rustling skirts, and she seemed to me superbly good-looking, in her tough, handsome way.

"I know why you're here, John," she said briskly. "And I won't tell you where she is, and I won't do anything about it. She wouldn't want me to. But we'll have a cup of coffee like civilized people."

She went over to the gas-ring in the corner and started fiddling around with cups and saucers and the percolator. Her room was exactly as I should have imagined it—magnificently untidy, with a lot of professional photographs of theatrical friends scattered around. There was one signed picture of Cathleen, in a heavy imitation-silver frame. Twice my eyes had winced away from it. But now I made myself look at it steadily.

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"Well, I can't help wondering," Margot said, "how long it is since you've dared to look at *your* photographs of her? I bet you have them hidden away out of sight."

She brought our cups and saucers and we sat balancing them. She was absolutely regal. The coffee was good and strong. She did not sip; she took a hearty swallow.

"So you've got success, John. That's the big thing," she said abruptly. "But you've lost the little things. You've got what we would all sell our souls to get—and you've sold yours. You've lost remembrance of the good little human things that make life worth living for the rest of us."

I didn't say anything. This time it was my turn not to argue with her. Besides, I could see that I was in for the sort of scolding which your wife's best friend is privileged to give.

"A big name in lights, and getting bigger," she said. "But how long is it since anybody has done anything for you—except on account of your name? How long since anybody has done anything for you just because you were another human being, like the rest of us?"

When a thoroughly well-intentioned woman is talking to you like that, all you can do is to bow your head before the storm. And anyway, there wasn't very much I could say. It went on for quite a while, but we ended brightly and cheerfully, as friends. When I picked up my hat and started to leave, she tucked her arm in mine and walked with me out into the hall.

"Well, see you backstage tonight, and thanks again," she said, while I went clattering down the stairs. "Don't forget to leave word at the stage-door to let me in."

"I won't forget," I said.

On the next floor down, the second floor of that old house, the door of another flat stood open and a little girl, maybe nine or ten years old, was busily sweeping. The broom was as tall as she was. When she looked up and smiled at me, a passing stranger, all the pale radiance of poor city childhood was there—the wistful anxious light that the city takes away before its children's faces are grown up.

"Hullo," she said.

I stopped, and smiled too. "Hullo," I said.

She had a woman's apron, of green checked gingham tied underneath her chin; but it was still so long for her that it looked as if she would trip over it. Behind her, in the cluttered half-darkness of that room, stood a Christmas tree. Some tinsel gleamed sparsely and dully on it, and a few dim packages lay on the floor under its branches.

"I see you're going to have quite a Christmas," I said.

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" Oh, yes ! " she said, and turned to look at the tree. For her it was so beautiful, it was the fullness of all promised magic.

From under the brim of my battered hat I watched her, and after a moment she sighed happily, gazing at the tree, and then turned back to me.

Shabby as I was, and unshaven, I must have looked like all the other people she knew, or even poorer.

" My name's Gretchen," she said sociably. " I get home from school earlier than my father or my mother from their jobs, so I was just tidying up the house a bit. What's your name ? "

" John," I said.

Hauling the broom along, she came to the door and we shook hands.

" And are you planning a nice Christmas, too ? " she asked in her best neighbourly voice.

" Well, you know, I haven't really thought much about it," I said.

" You mean you haven't any children ? " she asked.

I shook my head.

" And nobody ? " she said.

I didn't say anything, but I smiled again. And quietly, this child gazed at my face.

" Wait," she said.

She went back into the room—to the poor thin Christmas tree. Bending over, she anxiously studied the packages, and then picked one up. Coming back to the door, she silently held it out to me.

" Oh, no ! " I said. " I—"

Gently, she pushed the gift into my hand. A small sort of flatly limp package awkwardly wrapped in cheap holly paper, and painfully tied up with tinsel string.

" It isn't much," she said. " It's just a little old something I made for my father. But it's a little thing that you can unwrap on Christmas morning, and we've got lots. We've got so much."

With the eyes of a child looking at me and seeing me clearly—so clearly and with quiet pity—I think in that moment I learned one of the great lessons of my life. That sometimes it can be more blessed to receive.

Of course, I was wildly tempted to send to that little girl and her tired mother and father such a great lavish Christmas as they had never dreamed of. Of course, I could go shopping in the big stores ; I could have a dozen delivery vans at that door. But if I did—I would take away something that the child had for herself, for she had given to the poor and the lonely. So with her little limp package in my hand, I simply took off my hat and said gravely : " Thank you, Gretchen."

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"Merry Christmas," she said. "And don't be sad any more. Please."

When I looked up, Margot Kelly was still standing at the top of the stairs, where I had left her. She had seen all this. So I waved my hand to both of them, and left hurriedly. I couldn't stand any more.

That evening, Margot showed up timidly at the theatre only ten minutes before curtain-time.

Susan and I, ready to go on, were in her dressing-room when I heard the wandering and uncertain clicking of high heels in the corridor. I got up and went to the door.

"Hi, Margot," I said. "Here I am. Come along here and meet Susan."

I had expected the girl to be terrifically dressed up for the occasion, but she wasn't. She was wearing ordinary street clothes, rather subdued. I think she was shy and didn't want to be conspicuous, coming as a visitor among this company in this theatre. Susan, vivid as a flame, was sweet to her as only Susan knows how to be sweet; but as we all went up to the stage Margot suddenly seemed too big, and almost stumbling.

Hurriedly we introduced her to the rest of the company as they came drifting up. I think everybody tried to make her feel at home, but half-way through the first act when I came offstage, I saw that she was much more at ease with two or three of the minor members of the cast—much more like her breezy self, with them. I patted her shoulder as I went by, and she smiled brightly at me. Too brightly.

And later on in the evening, an odd thing happened. On the stage, Susan and I were working hard and smoothly towards our second-act curtain, the best scene in the play. The audience was laughing, in front, because as I said it is a bitter and brittle New York comedy. But standing in the wings alone, watching Susan work, Margot... Margot was crying. For all that she could never be, and didn't hope for, any more.

Susan, lovely and perceptive, knew it too; and was kinder than I knew how to be. She was Margot's hostess from then on, and I didn't see much more of either of them offstage. When the show was over, at the end of the third act, we took our curtain calls; Susan and I taking the last two or three together, reaching for each other's hands and then dropping them, laughing.

Margot was waiting in the wings, her eyes enormous, and as the two girls went downstairs together Margot almost stumbled again and Susan slipped a friendly arm around her waist. By the time I came walking slowly along the corridor, Susan's dressing-room

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door was closed and I could hear the two of them talking and laughing like old friends.

I was grateful to Susan for taking over, because I wanted to be alone. Susan's husband would be coming for her, and they would all go up to their flat on Central Park for supper. That would be grand for me. I couldn't bear to talk any more, just now, to anyone.

In my dressing-room, I stood looking at some more lavish professional presents which had arrived that day at the theatre. I had stacked them in a corner, on the floor.

Wearily, I started getting out of the sports clothes in which I play the last act. And then dressed only in slacks and vest, I found myself standing very still, staring at my old raincoat where I had hung it up behind the door.

I walked towards it, and from one of the pockets pulled out the limp little package that had been given me that afternoon in Brooklyn. I held it in my hand for a moment, the cheap slick holly paper, the carefully-knotted tinsel string. I laid it down on my dressing-table, all by itself, under the three-quarter square of light bulbs framing the mirror.

There it was, the ill-wrapped little package that a child had given me, a stranger, because she thought I was lonely and had nothing.

I was very tired, and I sat down and put my head on my folded arms on the dressing-table, just to rest. Against one elbow I could feel that package ; on my shoulders I could feel the heat of the lights. I heard people leaving the other dressing-rooms ; voices and laughter and departing feet along the corridor. Pretty soon it was very silent in the theatre.

I don't know how long I had rested there, when suddenly a big hand was laid very gently on my shoulder. I raised my face. It was Margot. So I don't know how long it must have been since she had silently opened my dressing-room door, nor how long she had stood there looking at me.

" Oh, hullo, Margot," I said. " I thought you'd gone."

" No," she said.

" O.K.," I said. " Give me a minute, and we'll go out and get some supper. I'll buy you a lobster, for old times' sake, and some champagne, too—for nearly Christmas."

" No," she said, " I must go. I've got a letter to write tonight. I know what to say, now, John. And I think Cathleen will listen to me."

" Oh, Margot," I said. " I—"

" Hush," she said. " So long, John." Gently, very gently, she fingered the little package, and walked away, closing the door for me.

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So I dare to hope that my girl, my own Cathleen, will be coming back. Maybe we'll open the little package whenever she gets here, but maybe we will never open it. Maybe we will just put it away somewhere, never really knowing what poor small magic is in it. Somewhere where I can get it out and look at it again sometimes. If ever I should nearly forget again.

* * *

WHEN I WAS A LAD

All my earliest memories are of intense delights. Some of these were of the country: many were of the waters; many others are of birds and flowers, of strange things seen and romantic impressions given, of customs and ways about to pass from use . . .

The bicycle was still a rare thing on the roads. The safety-bicycle hardly existed; the machine used was the old high primitive "penny-farthing," so called from the relative sizes of the front and rear wheels. The horse was the chief power for road-transport. Each country road had then beside it, on each side, a grassy strip for riders. The country-carriers with their vans still made some of the journeys from town to town, from market to market, as in England's far past. The Fire-Brigades had the power assumed by Falstaff, of seizing any man's horses, whenever a fire-call came. When I was little, there came a grave call for the fire-brigade; I saw a carriage stopped; the horses taken from it, and the carriage left stranded by the roadside.

Butchers, then, delivered meat daily by boys, dressed in blue blouses, who carried baskets or hods of meat upon pony-back. In those days of abundance and cheapness the English were meat-eaters. The outlying homes and hamlets had their letters delivered by postmen who rode on horseback and announced their coming by the blowing of horns. Those who heard the horn came to door or gate to save the postman the trouble of dismounting. The evening mail came by a four-in-hand mail-coach, at the famous "Tantivy trot," with the guard sometimes blowing what was called "a yard of tin," and sometimes pitching out packets of sorted mail to people waiting for his coming.

In those days of horses, some amateurs made figures on the roads. I remember one man who sometimes drove into Ledbury with a well-matched four-in-hand of greys. Several young men in the pride of youth drove tandem. On certain wonderful days when unusual weddings happened, the bridal party came from Church with four horses piloted by postilions in red. Sometimes, possibly thrice in a year, a traction engine came through the town, preceded by a man slowly walking, displaying a red flag of warning.

JOHN MASEFIELD, *So Long To Learn*

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★ *"At nightfall a little slave came from her I loved . . ." This Arabian Nights' entertainment is spiced with that subtlety of passion which traditionally enchants these ancient romances of Baghdad.*

LADY OF SWEET DESIRE

From the translation by

POWYS MATHERS

ONE day at Mecca, during the annual pilgrimage, just when the pilgrims were making their seven circles round the sacred Kaabah, a man came out from among them and, going to the wall of the Kaabah, took hold of the sacred veil which covers it with both his hands. Then he put himself into the attitude of prayer and cried with an accent of heartfelt sincerity: "Oh Allah, make the woman angry with her husband again, so that I can lie with her!"

When the pilgrims heard this strange prayer said in such a holy place, they were so scandalized that they threw themselves upon the man and, casting him to the ground, rained blows upon him. Then they dragged him before the *amir* of the pilgrims, whose authority is absolute over all of them, saying:

"Oh *amir*, we heard this man offering up impious words while he held the veil of the Kaabah!" Then they repeated the words, and the *amir* of the pilgrims said: "Let him hang!"

But the man threw himself at the *amir*'s feet crying: "I conjure you by the virtues of the Messenger of Allah (upon whom be prayer and peace!) to hear my story before you judge me!" The *amir* nodded assent, and he who was condemned to be hanged began his story.

O *amir* my trade is to collect the unpleasantness of the street. One day I was walking quietly behind my donkey, which was bearing a full load, when I met a large quantity of frightened persons fleeing in all directions or hiding in doorways. Looking behind them, I saw a troop of slaves armed with long sticks driving these foot-passengers before them. I asked what was the matter and was told that the *harim* of some great man was about to use that street, and it was therefore being cleared of people.

Knowing that I might be exposed to great danger if I continued on my way, I halted my ass and dragged him with me into the corner of a wall, where I hid as well as I could, turning my face so that I should not be tempted to look at the great man's women. Soon I

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heard the *harim* passing and was beginning to think of continuing my journey when I felt myself rudely seized in the two arms of a negro and saw my ass being carried off by another.

In my fright I turned my head and perceived thirty girls all looking at me; in the midst of them was a young woman with the languishing glances of a gazelle which thirst has tamed, and a waist as slim and supple as a banana palm.

With my hands tied behind my back, I was dragged along by other black eunuchs, in spite of my protestations and the protests of passers-by, who had seen me with my face to the wall and said to my persecutors: "He has done nothing! This poor man is an honest collector of unpleasantness. It is unlawful in the sight of Allah to arrest and bind an innocent man!" But my captors, without taking any notice, went on dragging me behind the *harim*.

I was dragged along, amid the pitying cries of the people, until we all came to the door of a great house, where I was forced into a forecourt, the magnificence of which I cannot describe to you. "This is the place of my punishment," I thought. "I shall be put to death, and none of my family will ever know the reason of my disappearance." In my last moments I began to think of my poor ass, which had always been so ready and careful, which had never upset the baskets of unpleasantness.

I was startled out of these afflicting reflections by the arrival of a pretty little boy slave, who gently begged me to follow him. He led me to a *hammam*, where I was received by three fair women slaves, who said: "Swiftly take off your rags."

When I had done as I was told, they took me into the hot room and bathed me with their own hands, one taking charge of my head, one of my limbs, and one of my belly. They rubbed me, perfumed me, and then dried me. Lastly, they brought magnificent robes and begged me to put them on. At this point I was greatly perplexed, for I did not know by which end to take them and had not the slightest idea how to arrange them, having never seen such things in all my life.

"As Allah lives, my mistresses," I said, "I shall have to remain naked, for I can never dress in these extraordinary clothes by myself!" Then the slaves came up to me laughing and helped me . . .

When they had finished dressing me and had sprinkled me with rose-water, they took me by the arm, as if I had been a bridegroom, and led me into a hall which was furnished so elegantly that I may not describe it and ornamented with paintings of coloured lines pleasantly interlaced. There I saw the woman of whom I have spoken, lying at ease on a bed of bamboo and ivory, dressed in a light robe of Mosul silk, with a few slaves about her.

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She signed to me to approach and, when I had done so, made me sit down. She ordered the slaves to bring food, and we were served with astonishing meats whose names I do not know and the like of which I had never seen before. I ate a few platefuls to satisfy my hunger and then, after washing my hands, set to upon the fruit.

Next, jars of various wines were brought and little censers of perfume; after we had been well smoked with incense and benzoin, the woman poured wine for me with her own hands, and we drank out of the same cup until we were both drunk. Finally, she signed to her slaves, who left us alone, and, pulling me towards her, threw her arms about me.

Each time that I pressed her against me, I grew drunk with the musk and amber of her body and thought that I was either dreaming or dead in the arms of a paradisal *huri*. We stayed embraced until the morning.

Then, when she told me that it was time to go, she informed herself of my address, saying that she would send for me should occasion serve. At parting she gave me a handkerchief embroidered with gold and silver, into which something was knotted at the corner. "Buy food for your ass," she said, and dismissed me as if I had been a bad angel and she Paradise.

When I got to the shop in which I lodged, I began to unknot the handkerchief, saying to myself: "This feels like five coppers; it would be enough to buy something for dinner." Picture my surprise when I found fifty *mithkals* of gold. Digging a hole, I hid them away against hard times and then, buying myself some bread and an onion, ate at the door of the shop, dreaming of my adventure.

At nightfall a little slave came from her I loved and led me back to the same hall and there she was waiting for me. I would have kissed the earth between her hands, but she raised me up and, stretching herself with me on the ivory and bamboo bed, gave me as blessed a night as the one before.

In the morning, when dismissing me, she gave me another handkerchief containing a further fifty *mithkals*. For eight whole days and nights this adventure was repeated; each time a feast, and fifty gold pieces for me.

One evening, when I had gone there and was already in the act of embracing her, a slave entered suddenly and, whispering some words in her mistress's ear, led me swiftly out of the hall and locked me into a room on the floor above. From that place I heard a great noise of horses in the street and saw, through a window which looked on to the courtyard, a young man, as handsome as the full moon, enter the house with a numerous train of guards and slaves.

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He went into the room where my lady was and passed all the night with her.

With morning, hardly had he disappeared when my lady came to me, saying: "You saw the young man who has just gone out? He is my husband. I will tell you what has passed between us in order that you may know why I chose you for my lover.

"One day I was sitting beside him in the garden when he left me and walked away in the direction of the kitchen. At first I thought that he had gone to satisfy some pressing need; but, when he had been absent for an hour, I went and looked for him where I thought he would be, and could not find him. At last I made my way towards the kitchen, to ask news from the servants, and on entering saw him lying on a mat with the dish cleaner, the filthiest slave of them all. I retired hastily, swearing to myself that I would no more receive him in my bed until I had revenged myself by taking a lover from among the lowest and ugliest of the people.

"Daily I walked about the streets looking for such a man, but it was only on the fifth day that I met you and gave you the palm, on account of your unusual dirtiness and filthy smell. Now I have accomplished my oath and am reconciled with my husband. You can retire with the assurance that, if my husband again lies with any of the slaves, I will send for you at once."

She gave me a further four hundred *mithkals* and dismissed me. I came to this place to implore Allah to drive the husband into that slave's arms, so that the wife may call me back to her. Such is my story, O *amir* of the pilgrims.

After hearing him, the *amir* of the pilgrims said: "We must pardon this man for his thoughtless words in presence of the Kaabah, for his circumstances seem to justify them."

At this point Shahrazād saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

* * *

INFANT PRODIGY

Walking with a friend in Chelsea one day, Whistler came upon a very grimy boy selling papers. Whistler examined him:

"How old are you?"

"Seven, sir."

"Oh, you must be more than that."

"No, I aint, sir."

"I don't think he could get that dirty in seven years, do you?" said Whistler to his friend as he paid for the interview.

HESKETH PEARSON, *The Man Whistler*

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★ *"In Tibet," said Grimsdyke, "they execute the unsuccessful candidates on the spot." With rapid shots at the soulless examiners, the author struggles to survive the perils—and humours—of "Finals." This last, racy episode from Richard Gordon's "Doctor in the House" ends his adventurous student career.*

OFF WITH HIS HEAD

by RICHARD GORDON

"YOU go to table four," the porter told me.

The room was the one we had written the papers in, but it was now empty except for a double row of baize-covered tables separated by screens. At each of these sat two examiners and a student who carried on a low earnest conversation with them, as though in a confessional.

I stood before table four. I didn't recognize the examiners. One was a burly, elderly man like a retired prize-fighter who smoked a pipe and was writing busily with a pencil in a note-book; the other was invisible, as he was reading the morning's *Times*.

"Good morning, sir," I said.

Neither of them took any notice. After a minute the burly fellow looked up from his writing and silently indicated the chair in front of him. I sat down. He growled.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" I asked politely.

"I said, you're number three hundred and six?" he said testily. "That's correct, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, why didn't you say so? How would you treat a case of tetanus?"

My heart leapt hopefully. This was something I knew, as there had recently been a case in St. Swithin's. I started off confidently, reeling out the lines of treatment and feeling much better.

The examiner suddenly cut me short.

"All right, all right," he said impatiently, "you seem to know that. A girl of twenty comes to you complaining of gaining weight. What do you do?"

This was the sort of question I disliked. There were so many things one could do that my thoughts jostled each other like a rugger scrum and became confused and unidentifiable.

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"I—I would ask if she was pregnant," I said.

"Good God, man! Do you go about asking all the girls you know if they're pregnant? What hospital d'you come from?"

"St. Swithin's, sir," I said, as though admitting an illegitimate parentage.

"I should have thought so! Now try again."

I rallied my thoughts and stumbled through the answer. The examiner sat looking past me at the opposite wall, acknowledging my presence only by grunting at intervals.

The bell rang and I moved into the adjoining chair, facing *The Times*. The newspaper rustled and was set down, revealing a mild, youngish-looking man in large spectacles with a perpetual look of faint surprise on his face. He looked at me as if he was surprised to see me there, and every answer I made was received with the same expression. I found this most disheartening.

The examiner pushed across the green baize a small sealed glass jar from a pathology museum, in which a piece of meat like the remains of a Sunday joint floated in spirit.

"What's that?" he asked.

I picked up the bottle and examined it carefully. By now I knew the technique for pathological specimens of this kind. The first thing to do was to turn them upside down, as their identity was often to be found on a label on the bottom. If one was still flummoxed one might sneeze or let it drop from nervous fingers to smash on the floor.

I upturned it and was disappointed to find the label had prudently been removed. Unfortunately there was so much sediment in the jar that it behaved like one of those little globes containing an Eiffel Tower that, on reversal, cover the model with a thick snowstorm. I could therefore not even see the specimen when I turned it back again.

"Liver," I tried.

"What!" exclaimed the surprised man. The other examiner, who had returned to his writing, slammed down his pencil in disgust and glared at me.

"I mean lung," I corrected.

"That's better. What's wrong with it?"

I could get no help from the specimen, which was still tossing in swirling white particles, so I took another guess.

"Pneumonia. Stage of white hepatization."

The surprised man nodded. "How do you test diphtheria serum?" he demanded.

"You inject it into a guinea-pig, sir."

"Yes, but you've got to have an animal of a standard weight, haven't you?"

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" Oh yes . . . a hundred kilogrammes."

The two men collapsed into roars of laughter.

" It would be as big as a policeman, you fool ! " shouted the first examiner.

" Oh, I'm so sorry," I stammered miserably. " I mean a hundred milligrammes."

The laughter was renewed. One or two of the examiners at near-by tables looked up with interest. The other candidates felt like prisoners in the condemned block when they hear the bolt go in the execution shed.

" You could hardly see it then, boy," said the surprised man, wiping his eyes. " The creature weighs a hundred grammes. However, we will leave the subject. How would you treat a case of simple sore throat ? "

" I would give a course of sulphonamide, sir."

" Yes, that's right."

" I disagree with you, Charles," the other interrupted forcibly. " It's like taking a hammer to a nut. I have an excellent gargle I have been prescribing for years which does very well."

" Oh, I don't know," said the surprised fellow warmly. " One must make use of these drugs. I've always had excellent results with sulphonamides."

" Did you read that paper by McHugh in the *Clinical Record* last winter ? " demanded the first examiner, banging the table again.

" Certainly I read it, George. And the correspondence which followed. Nevertheless, I feel it is still open to doubt—"

" I really cannot agree with you—"

They continued arguing briskly, and were still doing so when a second tinkle of the bell allowed me to slide out and rush miserably into the street.

The days after the *viva* were black ones. It was like having a severe accident. For the first few hours I was numbed, unable to realize what had hit me. Then I began to wonder if I would ever make a recovery and win through. One or two of my friends heartened me by describing equally depressing experiences that had overtaken them previously and still allowed them to pass. I began to hope. Little shreds of success collected together and wove themselves into a triumphal garland. After all, I thought, I got the bottle right, and I knew about tetanus . . . then I forgot about it in my anxiety over the last section of the examination, the clinical.

The clinical is probably the most chancy of the three parts. The student may be allotted a straightforward case with sounds in the chest that come through his stethoscope like the noise of an iron foundry ; or he may get something devilishly tricky.

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The cases for clinical examinations were collected from the out-patient departments of hospitals all over London, and were in the class referred to by physicians informally as "old chronics." They had their lesions healed as far as possible; now they walked around in fairly good health but with a collection of clicks, whistles, or rumbles inside them set up by the irreversible process of their diseases.

These are just the sort of things examiners like presenting to students. A case of vague ill-health or an indefinite lump are too arguable, but a good hearty slapping in the chest gives them the chance to fail a man outright if he misses it.

For this service the patients were given seven-and-six and free tea and buns. But most of them would happily have performed with a strictly amateur status and provided their own sandwiches. The six-monthly visits to the examination were their principal outings of the year. They attended their own hospitals monthly to show off to a single doctor the signs they proudly possessed and to discuss their ailments with fellow-patients on the benches outside, but in the exam they were inspected by hundreds of doctors—or as good as—and chatted to the *élite* of fellow-sufferers. It is much the same as winning an international rugby cap.

My first impression of the clinical examination was of a doctor's surgery gone into mass production. Patients were scattered across the room on couches, beds, and wheel-chairs, the men divided from the women by screens across the centre. They were in all stages of undress and examination. Circulating busily between them were a dozen or so nurses, examiners in white coats, and unhappy students dangling their stethoscopes behind them like the tails of whipped puppies.

I was directed to a pleasant, tubby little examiner.

"Hello, my lad," he began genially. "Where are you from? Swithin's, eh? When are you chaps going to win the rugger cup? Go and amuse yourself with that nice young lady in the corner and I'll be back in twenty minutes."

She was indeed a nice young lady. A redhead with a figure like a mannequin.

"Good morning," I said with a professional smile.

"Good morning," she returned brightly.

"Would you mind telling me your name?" I asked politely.

"Certainly. Molly Ditton. I'm unmarried, aged twenty-two, and my work is shorthand-typing, which I have been doing for four years. I live in Ilford and have never been abroad."

My heart glowed: she knew the form.

"How long have you been coming up here?" I asked. "You seem to know all the answers."

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She laughed.

"Oh, years and years. I bet I know more about myself than you do."

Just the thing! There is a golden rule for clinical examinations—ask the patient. They attend the examination for so many years and hear themselves discussed so often with the candidates that they have the medical terms off pat.

All I had to do was play my cards correctly. I talked to her about Ilford, and the wonderful advantages of living there; of shorthand-typing and its effect on the finger-nails; of her boy friends and her prospects of matrimony (this produced a few giggles); of the weather and where she went for her holidays.

"By the way," I said with careful casualness, "what's wrong with you?"

"Oh, I've mitral stenosis due to rheumatic fever, but I'm perfectly well compensated and I've a favourable prognosis. There's a pre-systolic murmur at the apex, but the aortic area is clear and there are no creps at the bases. By the way, my thyroid is slightly enlarged, they like you to notice that. I'm not fibrillating and I'm having no treatment."

"Thank you very much," I said.

The tubby man was delighted when I passed on to him the patient's accurate diagnosis as my own.

"Capital, capital!" he beamed. "Spotted the thyroid, too . . . glad some of you young fellers use your powers of observation. Been telling my own students for years—observe, observe, observe. They never do, though. Right you are, my lad. Now just take this ophthalmoscope and tell me what you can see in that old woman's eye."

My heart, which had been soaring like a swallow, took a sharp dive to earth. The examiner handed me the little black instrument with lenses for looking into the eye. I had often seen it used in the wards but I never seemed to find time to learn how to employ it myself. There was a knack to it, which I did not possess; and I knew that the defect was sufficient to fail me out of hand.

I imagined the examiner's sunny friendliness turning into a storm of irritation; my hand shook as I took the instrument. Slowly I placed it closely between my eye and the patient. All I could see was something that looked like a dirty tank in an aquarium with a large, dim fish in it. The time had come for quick thinking. Looking intently through the instrument I let out a long whistle of amazement.

"Yes, it is a big retinal detachment, isn't it?" the examiner said happily, taking away the ophthalmoscope and patting me on the

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back. I saw myself marked over the pass number and, with a grateful smile at the redhead, tripped downstairs in elation.

In the hall I met my friend Benskin, who was also a victim of the examiners. He was looking profoundly miserable.

"What's up?" I asked. Benskin shook his head and explained in a choked voice what had happened. While I was examining medical cases he had been questioned in practical midwifery.

One of the tests for prospective obstetricians was provided by a life-size *papier mâché* model of half the female trunk, into which a straw-stuffed baby was slipped through a trapdoor. The candidate was then provided with a pair of obstetrical forceps and required to deliver it *per vias naturales*.

This was demanded of Benskin. He solemnly applied the two blades to the head, taking care to put the correct one on first. He locked the handle, took it in the approved grip, and gave a strong pull. Nothing happened. He pulled harder, but the straw fœtus refused to be born.

He felt sweat on his brow and his mouth went dry; he saw his chances of passing fading like a spent match. He gave a desperate heave. His feet slipped on the polished floor and over his head flew mother, baby, forceps, and all.

The examiner looked at him lying on the floor for a second in silence. Then he picked up one blade of the forceps and handed it to him.

"Now hit the father with that," he said sourly, "and you'll have killed the whole bloody family."

"One doesn't fail exams," said Grimsdyke firmly, speaking with the authority of a student of long standing. "One comes down, one muffs, one is ploughed, plucked, or pipped. These infer a misfortune that is not one's own fault. To speak of failing is bad taste. It's the same idea as talking about passing away and going above instead of plain dying."

We were sitting with Benskin in the King George. It was immediately after opening time in the morning and we were alone in the bar. We sat on stools, resting our elbows on the counter and our heads on our hands. All three of us looked pitifully dejected. The examination results were to be published at noon.

"It's the heartless way they do it," I said. "Picking you out one at a time in front of everybody. I wish they'd show a little decent discretion about the business. I'd much prefer it if they sent you a letter. You can at least slink away and open it in the lavatory or somewhere."

"In Tibet, I believe," Grimsdyke went on, "they simply execute the unsuccessful candidates on the spot."

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" Well, they probably welcome it."

" They failed Harris pretty decently," Benskin said reverently, as though speaking of the dead. " He's so sure he'll have to take it again in six months he's not even bothering to hear the results. When he floundered badly in his *viva* the old boy simply looked dreamily out of the window and said : ' Young man, how mysterious and wonderful is Nature ! Now we see the leaf turning gold on the branch and falling to the ground. The flowers and plants have lost their summer beauty and withered, and the earth looks dead beyond hope of resurrection. But in the month of April the spring will come, the trees will burst into green flames, the shoots will leap up through the black soil, and plants will cover the bare flowerbeds. And you and I, my boy, will be here to see it, won't we ? ' "

" I think that was very bad form," said Grimsdyke.

Mine host of the King George, generally known as the Padre, put three small glasses in front of us.

" Whisky ? " Grimsdyke said. " I thought we ordered beer."

" If you will permit me, Mr. Grimsdyke, I would like to suggest, on the basis of my experience, something a little more nourishing. I know what a difficult time this is for you young gentlemen. Will you please accept these with the compliments of the house ? "

" Here, I say, Padre . . . ! " He held up his hand.

" Not a bit of it, sir. The money I have been obliged to take off you in our long acquaintance more than justifies it. Here's jolly good luck, gentlemen ! " " Bottoms up," said Benskin.

" I'm sure I've failed, all the same," I said, putting my glass down. " How could I get through after that terrible *viva* ? "

Benskin snorted.

" It's all very well for you to talk. What about my midwifery clinical ? That came under the heading of ugly incidents."

" You never know, my dear old boy," Grimsdyke said hopefully. " You may have done brilliantly in the papers."

" Let's not talk about it," I said. " Let's discuss rugger."

At noon we arrived in the examination building. The same number of candidates were there, but they were a subdued, muttering crowd, like the supporters of a home team who had just been beaten in a cup tie.

We pushed our way into the large hall on the ground floor. It was packed full with anxious students. On the side of the hall facing us was the foot of a marble staircase. To the left of the staircase was a plain, open door, over which had been recently pinned a large black and white card saying EXIT. To the right was a clock, which stood at a few minutes before twelve.

We had heard exactly what would happen. At midday precisely,

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the Secretary of the Committee would descend the stairs and take his place, flanked by two uniformed porters, on the lowest step. Under his arm would be a thick, leather-covered book containing the results. One of the porters would carry a list of the candidates' numbers and call them out, one after the other. The candidate would step up closely to the Secretary, who would say simply "Pass" or "Failed." Successful men would go upstairs to receive the congratulations and handshakes of the examiners and failures would slink miserably out of the exit to seek the opiate of oblivion.

"One thing, it's quick," Benskin muttered nervously.

"Like the drop," said Grimsdyke.

One minute to twelve. The room had suddenly come to a frightening, unexpected stillness, like the silence when one is waiting for a bomb to go off. A clock tinged twelve in the distance. My palms were as wet as sponges. Someone coughed, and I expected the windows to rattle. With slow, scraping feet that could be heard before they appeared, the Secretary and porters came solemnly down the stairs. They took up their positions; the leather book was opened. The elder porter raised his voice.

"Number two hundred and nine," he began. "Number thirty-seven. Number one hundred and fifty."

The tension in the room broke as the students shuffled to the front and lined up before the staircase. The numbers were not called in order, and the candidates strained to hear their own over the low rumble of conversation and scraping of feet that rose from the assembly. "Number one hundred and sixty-one," continued the porter. "Number three hundred and two. Number three hundred and six."

Grimsdyke punched me hard in the ribs.

"Go on!" he hissed. "It's you!"

I jumped, and struggled my way to the front of the restless crowd. My pulse shot high in my ears. My face was burning hot and I felt my stomach had been suddenly plucked from my body.

I lined up in the short queue by the stairs. My mind was empty and numb. I stared at the red neck of the man in front of me, with its rim of blue collar above his coat, and studied it with foolish intensity. Suddenly I found myself on top of the Secretary.

"Number three oh six?" the Secretary whispered, without looking up from the book. "R. Gordon?"

"Yes," I croaked.

The world stood still. The traffic stopped, the plants ceased growing, men were paralysed, the clouds hung in the air, the winds dropped, the tides disappeared, the sun halted in the sky.

"Pass," the man muttered.

Blindly, like a man just hit by blackjack, I stumbled upstairs.

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The bar of the King George was full. I crashed through the door like a hot wind.

"I've passed!" I screamed.

The bar rose in turmoil. I couldn't see any of it. It was a pink jumble of faces, a numb sensation of handshakes, a dim perception of back-slapping.

"Congratulations, sir!" shouted the Padre thrusting his hand through the mob. "Congratulations, Doctor! Here you are, sir. A quart tankard, sir. With my every best wish."

Someone pushed the deep pewter mug into my hands.

"Down the hatch!" "One gulp, old man!"

I was too breathless to drink. I wanted to laugh, cry, dance, and run all at the same time.

"I can't believe it!" I exclaimed. "It isn't true! The first thing I knew I was shaking hands with the old boys and signing my diploma."

"How about the other two gentlemen?" the Padre called.

"Oh Lord!" I felt suddenly guilty. "I'd quite forgotten to wait for them!"

At that moment the door flew open. There entered Benskin and Grimsdyke wearing each others' jackets, attempting to pull in with them a violently neighing carthorse.

"I think it's all right," the Padre said.

The party went on until closing time. Every student in the school seemed to be inside the tiny bar. I emptied and re-emptied my tankard. Everyone was shouting and singing, leaning on each other, jostling their neighbours, slapping their friends on the back. The angry owner of the horse had been asked inside and was now singing *Lily of Laguna* to a co-operative audience. The room filled tighter as the news of more successes was brought in, like victories to a triumphant headquarters.

"Bottle's through," I heard Evans bawling over the hubbub. "So's Sprogget."

"How about you?" I shouted back.

Evans delightedly stuck his thumb in the air.

I suddenly found myself jammed between Benskin and Grimsdyke. "Hooray!" shouted Benskin, ruffling my hair.

"It's bloody funny!" Grimsdyke shouted. "Bloody funny!"

"What *is*?" I bawled at him.

"We're three bloody doctors," he hollered.

We burst into roars of laughter.

* * *

☆ ***When you have read this copy of ARGOSY why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?***

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AND SO TO BED

Sweet pillow, sweetest bed
A chamber deaf to noise, and blind to light;
A rosy garland, and a weary head

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

These are to Certify that in the year 1721 we agreed with Christopher Fox to destroy the vermin in 4 Rooms Containing 49 Beds all which was performed with a Liquid so inofencive that the Beds were made use of the same Night and were so Effectually performed that notwithstanding the Beds, Walls, Ceiling, &c., were Exceeding full yet upon diligent Observation now the Weather grows warm have not found above three Live Buggs, and any who pleases to Come to the House undermentioned may see the Beds and have further Satisfaction.

From the Committee of Ye Workhouse of the People Calld Quakers near Clerkenwell, 1722

Perchance to Dream

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired,
But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind, when body's work's expired . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Under Her Pillow

The curtains of her ladyship's room were down, and the chamber dark, and she was in bed with a nightcap on her head, and propped up by her pillows, looking none the less ghastly because of the red which was still on her cheeks, and which she could not afford to forego.

"Is that the doctor?" she said.

"There is no use with this deception, madam," Captain Westbury said. "My duty is to arrest the person of Thomas, Viscount Castlewood, a non-juring peer; and Henry Holt, a Jesuit priest, who is now at the head of the conspiracy which was about to break out in this country against the authority of their Majesties King William and Queen Mary; and my orders are to search the house for such papers or traces of the conspiracy as may be found here . . ."

"You see, sir, that I have the rheumatism, and cannot move," said the lady, looking uncommonly ghastly as she sat up in her bed . . .

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" Madam, if you are too ill to leave the bed," the Captain then said, rather sternly, " I must have four of my men to lift you off in the sheet . . . Papers may be hidden in a bed as elsewhere; we know that very well, and—"

Here it was her ladyship's turn to shriek, for the Captain, with his fist shaking the pillows and bolsters, at last came to " burn " as they say in the play of forfeits, and wrenching away one of the pillows, said, " Look! Did not I tell you so? Here is a pillow stuffed with paper."

" Some villain has betrayed us! " cried out my lady sitting up in the bed, showing herself full dressed under her night-rail.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY, *Henry Esmond*

Bedfellows

Here lies sweet Isabell in bed,
With a night-cap on her head;
Her skin is soft, her face is fair,
And she has very pretty hair;
She and I in bed lies nice,
And undisturbed by rats or mice;
She is disgusted with Mr. Worgan,
Though he plays upon the organ.
Her nails are neat, her teeth are white,
Her eyes are very, very bright;
Here ends sweet Isabella's story,
And may it be much to her glory.

MARJORIE FLEMING, 1803–1811

Up in the Morning . . .

To those who awake in the morning with a fattish head and a feeling of animosity towards the Universe, may I recommend the game of " Bed-darts." If there is a time when the average married couple needs a little distraction, it is when they have been brutally aroused by the postman's knock (two bulb catalogues, an invitation to support the local Cats' Home, and three letters beginning: " Dear sir, Unless . . .") from dreams of affluence and Tahiti; and a jolly game of darts is just what is needed to loosen up the corpuscles and prepare the mind, if any, to face another day. Why nobody has thought of this before is one of the things—others being the precise purpose of the Pyramids and the reason why cows get up stern first—I cannot understand.

HEATH ROBINSON and K.R.G. BROWNE,
How to be a Perfect Husband

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Behind the News

How often I've read
sad tales in the News
. . . . . about bed
sitting-rooms in a Mews
in Mayfair and Blooms-
bury, flowery places
where brides and their grooms
enjoyed tragic embraces.
Gas ovens galore
and curates degraded—
the crimes only bore
and the hemlock is faded.
The torsos in trunks
look shabby and shoddy ;
Korea debunks
the romance of a Body,
the beds of the 'Thirt-
ies, the thighs and the thews ;
and iron are the curt-
ains that hang in the Mews . . .

REGINALD REYNOLDS, *Beds*

Sweeter than Honey

"You laugh beautifully, my darling," Karen murmured sleepily, "and you make love beautifully too. When you love me I feel as if I were a goddess being worshipped, a White Goddess to the savages and you the savages, carefully restrained in worship but with filed teeth and a big gold ring in your ear."

He lay on his back in the sweated bed listening to her and staring contentedly at the ceiling half-sleepily after a full good rich meal, feeling the fine-boned hand that was almost transparent . . . fingering lightly on his chest and the high well lighted room gave them the secret and anonymous solitude that only a hotel room can give as outside the locked door he heard rug-muffled footsteps passing along the corridor and whispered voices coming to him faintly and keys rattling and doors slamming shut with secret finality . . .

"Nobody ever loved me like you love me," Karen said snugly.

"Nobody ?" he said.

Karen laughed and it was like honey dripping from a spoon back into the jar between you and the sunlight.

"No, nobody," she said.

JAMES JONES, *From Here to Eternity*

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THE SMILE

The conversation was not to become general—marriage was on his mind

by WILLIAM SANSOM

THE Paris Central Post Office, the big old building behind the Halles, smelled as usual of old vulcanite telephones and dust-dead red-brown woodwork. Plenty of iron there, iron grilles and gratings, and these all smelled the same, vulcanite and dust. And the usual small crowd stood haplessly about the *Poste Restante* hall. Though such smells are normal, and the dismal, as though letterless, dark spaces of light are normal—the people in that particular hall seem seldom quite normal.

An air of tragedy hangs about the pigeon-holes, about people without addresses, about the meek queue that has gathered from all over Paris for the letters that will change their lives and that never come.

However, that morning was distinguished particularly by a tall thin man in a dark yellow velour hat who took no trouble to hide his agitation. He was perhaps forty, of good looks greyed and shrunk with worry or ill-health or madness. He had a wild look in his pale-blue eyes, his overcoat flapped about his thin body; he walked to and from the *guichet* five times in as many minutes, ignoring the queue, pushing his great hat at the clerk, rapping out some sharp remark, only to retreat again.

He would come striding back, shoulders hunched in thought, eyes blazing, that furry mud-yellow hat giving his face a strange dark look. He would sit down muttering. To be up again in a minute at the *guichet*.

It was impossible to laugh at such evident upset: and without the defence of laughter, one is left open to the infection of nervous trouble—soon I was becoming as nervous as he. It was because of this that I had, in self-protection, to speak to him. To say anything, to say in fact:

"It's a long wait here. But at least they make you comfortable."

People in such a state as that man was in should jump as though the stranger holds a bomb. But no, he did not start or jump at being so suddenly addressed: no frightened glare of eye, no eruption of shakes and nods. Instead this man seemed instantly to calm, the lips

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in his strained face moved into a smile of great charm, and the voice that spoke from them came tender and musical. He seemed more to croon than to speak. His eyes were soft with pleasure. He made me feel like . . . what ? . . . a most desirable crystallized fruit.

" Yes. Indeed they do make you comfortable. These benches—this great office . . ."

He raised a hand to embrace the dusty echoing hall. Old iron electroliers, the spouting black tubes of old telegraph-machines, metal-grimed panels of dust-dull wood took on a sudden beauty with the glance of his hand. Then :

" And you, sir ? You've been waiting long ? "

" No, not long. My letter hasn't . . ."

" Ah ? A letter—from your wife, perhaps ? "

" No."

" But you *are* married ? "

" What ? "

" You, sir, are *married* ? "

" Oh . . . no."

His eyes studied me with care. There was a kind of pause in which I felt I had to hold my breath—as though he were testing me with a stethoscope. Then he nodded slowly and said softly :

" Marriage can be a very beautiful thing."

It was plain that the conversation was not to become general. Marriage was on his mind. It was only polite for me to inquire :

" So you, sir, are married ? "

" Yes. That is to say—I was. Well, I still am in a manner of speaking. But no, not quite . . ."

It was difficult to find an answer to that. I think I coughed and put on a face of polite, perhaps intense, inquiry. But there was no need. He went on with his thoughts calmly, consideratively, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, as if I were an old friend and we were talking together of the past.

" You see," he said, " my wife and I live apart. She in Rouen. I in Paris : and—oh, all over the place, I travel. But not only distance parts us ; we are separated by mutual consent.

" She deserted me. That is to say, I deserted her. That is, I left her because she deserted me. She deserted me in her heart. She betrayed me. Or perhaps she didn't ? I don't know. Sometimes I think she never deserted me."

He was not growing agitated, he was simply interested in what he was thinking. It was plain that these were old thoughts, thought and thought over again.

He continued :

" We were in love, let me tell you—we were so much in love.

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We had our little flat, my wife ran it so prettily, and to come home was a joy. Sometimes we went to sit with friends, to take a drink down by the market—but mostly we stayed at home. That is, when I was at home. For I travelled. Yes, travelled. My line was cord, rope, manillas.

" I think I remember every corner of our little flat, every colour, all the furniture, every small object. Yes. But best of all I remember the bedroom. There was a grey and pink paper on the walls, and a large mirror ringed with enamel in a pretty pattern of leaves. The curtains were red, and by them stood the bed—for the fine polished bed-head stood at the window end of the room.

" Lying in bed there, from my comfortable rest on the good soft pillow, I saw first a strip of sheet, then the old pink eiderdown all down at my feet, and then the wooden foot-end of the bed—over that the door, and to the left a big old wood wardrobe with a bright brass handle.

" But the bed-end—the bed-end is the thing. Have you ever thought what an important part the bed-end plays in your life ? How much time you lie—comfortable and at rest, secure there and perhaps with your loved one—gazing at the protective panel rising at your feet ? Knowing each knot of wood, each play of light ? And then perhaps not noticing it at all, but using it as a kind of screen upon which you project the dreams and the wonderful thoughts passing through your mind ? Ah, what histories of the mind our bed-ends could tell."

I murmured that I had not exactly considered this—particularly since (apologetically) my bed had no such end—but that I saw certainly that it could be so.

He only nodded, still away with his thoughts. His stained furry yellow hat with its thick brim nodded, and he went on :

" Yes, we knew that room well. We would lie there with the world locked out. In winter the wind would rap on the windows, in summer the cats would howl like mad things—but we were safe in there on our pillows. Safe with a thousand things to say to each other, with a thousand minutes to spare.

" And now I must tell you about the smile. A strange thing and a lovely thing. I mean her morning smile. It was something special —listen carefully.

" Picture us lying there side by side. The night over, the day beginning. I wake first. I always woke first, she was a deep sleeper. So I could lie there for some minutes watching her softly sleeping face, warm from the night, tousled and a little puffed. But oh—relaxed, innocent. Then I'd stir about a bit and this would disturb her, she'd give a moan and begin to wake.

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"Now's the moment.

"She'd be lying on her back, that's how she always lay, and her eyes would open upwards to the ceiling. The lids would slowly fall apart, and suddenly there, after all those sleep-long hours, her eyes would be. For a moment she'd seem to stare, perplexed, at the ceiling as if she were trying to make out what ceiling this was. Then—still not knowing where she could be—she'd waken to the idea that something, somebody, was lying warm in the bed by her side. Very gently her hand would approach and feel. To make sure.

"Slowly then, slowly her eyes would turn. First her eyes. But they would not turn far enough. So carefully—so as to make no sound, as carefully as a creeping animal, she'd turn her head. Meanwhile a frown, a deep and concentrated frown would be digging its grave between her eyes. All innocence gone. A face of trouble—a face saying: 'What have I done. . . . ? How . . . ? Where . . . ? No, I've done it again . . . Well, it's got to be faced . . .'

"The face of a fallen angel. The face that knew its sin—and troubled, oh troubled as if bruised by sin, by a hopelessness of ever being able to defeat desire. That face of hers now turned and dared to look at the man beside her . . . Her eyelids blinked, she frowned harder, peered hard, trying from sleep to focus my face beside her.

"And then, my friend, she saw that the face was mine . . . and that was when the smile came. A beautiful smile. A sunrise all over her face. A sigh of a smile as all the relief in the world came flooding from her heart deep and warm within the chaste silk at her breast . . . a smile of great and tender love . . .

"Then, as if she were coming home from some terrible journey of the mind, she'd embrace me . . ."

The stained yellow hat nodded. His grey-rimmed eyes softened as he remembered. But for a moment only. For then he turned sharply at me, suspiciously, and the words came tumbling faster:

"I know what you're thinking. You're thinking she must be a fine sort of woman to imagine herself in a strange bed? With a strange man, eh? Well . . . I'm not disguising things, it's true enough.

"When I met her she was leading quite a life. Cabaret. Dancer. Wasn't above making a bit with the customers either—it was her life, she didn't see anything wrong in it. The world's full of people righteously modest about the bedroom—yet shamefully immodest about all other things; about avarice, aggression, envy and all the real sins. She was just the opposite. She was a pure soul.

"It didn't matter to me what she'd been up to before. We fell in love and that wiped out the lot. If anything, it was a kind of attraction—I wouldn't have known that smile otherwise, would I?"

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I murmured something. It is difficult to receive such sudden confidence. And I had to appear pleased at his idyll, yet sorrowful that it was ended. But as I began to murmur my regret, he began again—he pulled himself up and chuckled :

" You see, that smile was my treasure. Yet—if you understand —I was too close to it. It took place, as it were, a few inches only from my own face. And one morning I determined—for I loved it so—to see it from a little farther away. Or rather to see it *via* its opposite. To see its opposite as a picture.

" I'll tell you what I did. It was quite a plan.

" I had a friend in hats. A traveller in the hat business. He got me what I wanted. One of those tailor's dummy heads they use in their shop windows. A good-looking head too. With a moustache.

" I made the moustache bigger. I drew a great black bush of a moustache—and I put a great black beard on it too, black as sin. I was clean-shaven myself. It looked very frightening, but I didn't think of that then, I just wanted to make it plain it wasn't me.

" You can see what I was after.

" The next morning I crept out of bed quietly. She didn't stir. She was fast asleep. I had my side untucked, it was easy to shove in a bolster and then place that head with its great black beard turned towards her on the pillow . . ."

He was chuckling as he remembered, he had the scene well in his mind's eye, living it over again stage by stage.

" Then I went to the foot of the bed. She was fast asleep.

" Everything was ready. I opened the door behind me and slammed it—bang !

" She was like an automatic doll going into action. Always the same. Eyes to the ceiling. Blink. What ceiling is this ? Then—slowly, slowly round to the chap on the pillow . . . the eyes alone, not the face . . . slowly, slowly, all apprehension . . ."

Suddenly he stopped chuckling. His own eyes grew fearful. His jaw sagged, worked up and down inanely with no words. He was so much inside his own story that he seemed to have surprised himself with some shocking development. Then the words came, grave, whispered, furtive with apology :

" You see . . . I didn't ever imagine . . . it was only a game . . . I didn't mean anything . . . I only wanted to see, you know, the reverse of that smile, the smile I loved . . . I never wanted to change anything, I never deserved what happened, never . . ."

He grasped his grey hands, made a pain of white knuckles :

" If only . . . but no, what's done . . . a life ruined, utterly ruined . . . by a moment . . . all over . . . a second's fun . . ."

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He fell silent, staring ahead. The great exchange smelled dully of its old vulcanite. The people stood aimlessly around, eyes unhappily on the pigeon-holes and the grilles that hid their letters. From somewhere, now and then, came a dull pneumatic click.

I waited. But still he said nothing. It was difficult to prompt him, the subject was evidently so painful. Yet it was also difficult to resist. So at length:

"But . . . then what happened? When she . . . but please if it's too painful . . . ?"

"Eh?"

"What . . . happened . . . then . . . ?"

"Oh—don't you see?"

"Well—no . . ."

He looked surprised. He opened his hands wide, as if he held something—a gift or a prayer or a pain—too surprising, too unbelievable to hold.

"Sir, I said that I'd often seen her smile. Often. But believe me until that morning I had never known how pleased, how utterly thankful, a smile could really be."

* * *

ANSWERS to BOYS WILL BE BOYS on page 48

1. *David Copperfield's conversation with Mr. Mell after his arrival at Salem House, from "David Copperfield," by Charles Dickens.*
2. *Mr. Goldicutt's farewell to Paul Bultitude, after the famous train journey during which Paul lay hidden under the seat, in "Vice Versa," by F. Anstey.*
3. *Stalky, in "Stalky & Co.," by Rudyard Kipling. With McTurk and Beetle he had just been caned by the Head.*
4. *Jeremy Cole, in "Jeremy at Crale," by Hugh Walpole. The scene after the Goats had raided the midnight feast.*
5. *Ronnie Winslow, in "The Winslow Boy," by Terence Rattigan. The play is based on the expulsion of a Dartmouth boy accused of stealing a postal order.*
6. *Michael Fane, in "Sinister Street," by Compton Mackenzie, takes leave of his master, Mr. Caryll.*
7. *William Dobbin, in "Vanity Fair," by W. M. Thackeray, who was teased at Dr. Swishtail's because his father was a grocer.*
8. *The finish of the race coxed by Lycidas Marsh, nicknamed "Don Q," in "The Bending of a Twig," by Desmond F. T. Coke.*

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BROTHERS OF AJACCIO

"My boy," he said, clapping me on the shoulder, "the Emperor wants to see you"

by SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

WHEN the Emperor needed an agent he was always very ready to do me the honour of recalling the name of Etienne Gerard, though it occasionally escaped him when rewards were to be distributed. Still, I was a colonel at twenty-eight, and the chief of a brigade at thirty-one, so that I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my career.

Had the wars lasted another two or three years I might have grasped my baton, and the man who had his hand upon that was only one stride from a throne. Murat had changed his hussar's cap for a crown, and another light cavalry man might have done as much. However, all those dreams were driven away by Waterloo, and, although I was not able to write my name upon history, it is sufficiently well known by all who served with me in the great wars of the Empire.

What I want to tell you tonight is about the very singular affair which first started me upon my rapid upward course, and which had the effect of establishing a secret bond between the Emperor and myself.

There is just one little word of warning which I must give you before I begin. When you hear me speak, you must always bear in mind that you are listening to one who has seen history from the inside. I am talking about what my ears have heard and my eyes have seen, so you must not try to confute me by quoting the opinions of some student or man of the pen, who has written a book of history or memoirs. There is much which is unknown by such people, and much which never will be known by the world.

For my own part, I could tell you some very surprising things were it discreet to do so. The facts which I am about to relate to you tonight were kept secret by me during the Emperor's lifetime, because I gave him my promise that it should be so, but I do not think that there can be any harm now in my telling the remarkable part which I played.

You must know, then, that at the time of the Treaty of Tilsit I was a simple lieutenant in the 10th Hussars, without money or

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interest. It is true that my appearance and my gallantry were in my favour, and that I had already won a reputation as being one of the best swordsmen in the army; but among the host of brave men who surrounded the Emperor it needed more than this to ensure a rapid career. I was confident, however, that my chance would come, though I never dreamed that it would take so remarkable a form.

When the Emperor returned to Paris, after the declaration of peace in the year 1807, he spent much of his time with the Empress and the Court at Fontainebleau. It was the time when he was at the pinnacle of his career.

He had in three successive campaigns humbled Austria, crushed Prussia, and made the Russians very glad to get upon the right side of the Niemen. The old Bulldog over the Channel was still growling, but he could not get very far from his kennel. If we could have made a perpetual peace at that moment, France would have taken a higher place than any nation since the days of the Romans. So I have heard the wise folk say, though for my part I had other things to think of.

All the girls were glad to see the army back after its long absence, and you may be sure that I had my share of any favours that were going. You may judge how far I was a favourite in those days when I say that even now, in my sixtieth year—but why should I dwell upon that which is already sufficiently well known.

Our regiment of hussars was quartered with the horse chasseurs of the guard at Fontainebleau. It is, as you know, but a little place, buried in the heart of the forest, and it was wonderful at this time to see it crowded with Grand Dukes and Electors and Princes, who thronged round Napoleon like puppies round their master, each hoping that some bone might be thrown to him.

There was more German than French to be heard in the street, for those who had helped us in the late war had come to beg for a reward, and those who had opposed us had come to try and escape their punishment.

And all the time our little man, with his pale face and his cold, grey eyes, was riding to the hunt every morning, silent and brooding, all of them following in his train, in the hope that some word would escape him. And then, when the humour seized him, he would throw a hundred square miles to that man, or tear as much off the other, round off one kingdom by a river, or cut off another by a chain of mountains. That was how he used to do business, this little artilleryman, whom we had raised so high with our sabres and our bayonets.

He was very civil to us always, for he knew where his power came from. We knew also, and showed it by the way in which we carried ourselves. We were agreed, you understand, that he was the finest

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leader in the world, but we did not forget that he had the finest men to lead.

Well, one day I was seated in my quarters playing cards with young Morat, of the horse chasseurs, when the door opened and in walked Lasalle, who was our Colonel. You know what a fine, swaggering fellow he was, and the sky-blue uniform of the Tenth suited him to a marvel. My faith, we youngsters were so taken by him that we all swore and diced and drank and played the deuce whether we liked it or no, just that we might resemble our Colonel!

We forgot that it was not because he drank or gambled that the Emperor was going to make him the head of the light cavalry, but because he had the surest eye for the nature of a position or for the strength of a column, and the best judgment as to when infantry could be broken, or whether guns were exposed, of any man in the army.

We were too young to understand all that, however, so we waxed our moustaches and clinked our spurs and let the ferrules of our scabbards wear out by trailing them along the pavement in the hope that we should all become Lasalles.

When he came clanking into my quarters, both Morat and I sprang to our feet.

"My boy," said he, clapping me on the shoulder, "the Emperor wants to see you at four o'clock."

The room whirled round me at the words, and I had to lean my hands upon the edge of the card-table.

"What?" I cried. "The Emperor!"

"Precisely," said he, smiling at my astonishment.

"But the Emperor does not know of my existence, Colonel," I protested. "Why should he send for me?"

"Well, that's just what puzzles me," cried Lasalle, twirling his moustache. "If he wanted the help of a good sabre, why should he descend to one of my lieutenants when he might have found all that he needed at the head of the regiment?

"However," he added, clapping me on the shoulder again in his hearty fashion, "every man has his chance. I have had mine, otherwise I should not be Colonel of the Tenth. I must not grudge you yours. Forward, my boy, and may it be the first step towards changing your busby for a cocked hat."

It was but two o'clock, so he left me, promising to come back to accompany me to the palace. My faith, what a time I passed, and how many conjectures did I make as to what it was that the Emperor could want of me! I paced up and down my little room in a fever of anticipation.

Sometimes I thought that perhaps he had heard of the guns

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which we had taken at Austerlitz; but, then, there were so many who had taken guns at Austerlitz, and two years had passed since the battle. Or it might be that he wished to reward me for my affair with the *aide-de-camp* of the Russian Emperor. But then again a cold fit would seize me, and I would fancy that he had sent for me to reprimand me. There were a few duels which he might have taken in ill part, and there were one or two little jokes in Paris since the peace.

But, no! I considered the words of Lasalle. "If he had need of a brave man," said Lasalle.

It was obvious that my Colonel had some idea of what was in the wind. If he had not known that it was to my advantage, he would not have been so cruel as to congratulate me. My heart glowed with joy as this conviction grew upon me, and I sat down to write to my mother and to tell her that the Emperor was waiting, at that very moment, to have my opinion upon a matter of importance.

It made me smile as I wrote it to think that, wonderful as it appeared to me, it would probably only confirm my mother in her opinion of the Emperor's good sense.

At half-past three I heard a sabre come clanking against every step of my wooden stair. It was Lasalle, and with him was a lame gentleman, very neatly dressed in black with dapper ruffles and cuffs. We did not know many civilians, we of the army, but, my word, this was one whom we could not afford to ignore!

I had only to glance at those twinkling eyes, the comical, upturned nose, and the straight, precise mouth, to know that I was in the presence of the one man in France whom even the Emperor had to consider.

"This is Monsieur Etienne Gerard, Monsieur de Talleyrand," said Lasalle.

I saluted, and the statesman took me in from the top of my panache to the rowel of my spur, with a glance that played over me like a rapier point.

"Have you explained to the lieutenant the circumstances in which he is summoned to the Emperor's presence?" he asked, in his dry, creaking voice.

They were such a contrast, these two men, that I could not help glancing from one to the other of them: the black, sly politician, and the big, sky-blue hussar with one fist on his hip and the other on the hilt of his sabre. They both took their seats as I looked, Talleyrand without a sound, and Lasalle with a clash and a jingle like a prancing charger.

"It's this way, youngster," said he, in his brusque fashion: "I was with the Emperor in his private cabinet this morning when a note was brought in to him. He opened it, and as

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he did so he gave such a start that it fluttered down on to the floor.

"I handed it up to him again, but he was staring at the wall in front of him as if he had seen a ghost. '*Fratelli dell' Ajaccio*,' he muttered; and then again, '*Fratelli dell' Ajaccio*.' I don't pretend to know more Italian than a man can pick up in two campaigns, and I could make nothing of this. It seemed to me that he had gone out of his mind; and you would have said so also, Monsieur de Talleyrand, if you had seen the look in his eyes.

"He read the note, and then he sat for half an hour or more without moving."

"And you?" asked Talleyrand.

"Why, I stood there not knowing what I ought to do. Presently he seemed to come back to his senses.

"'I suppose, Lasalle,' said he, 'that you have some gallant young officers in the Tenth?'

"'They are all that, sire,' I answered.

"'If you had to pick one who was to be depended upon for action, but who would not think too much—you understand me, Lasalle—which would you select?' he asked.

"I saw that he needed an agent who would not penetrate too deeply into his plans.

"'I have one,' said I, 'who is all spurs and moustaches, with never a thought beyond women and horses.'

"'That is the man I want,' said Napoleon. 'Bring him to my private cabinet at four o'clock.'

"So, youngster, I came straight away to you at once, and mind that you do credit to the 10th Hussars."

I was by no means flattered by the reasons which had led to my Colonel's choice, and I must have shown as much in my face, for he roared with laughter and Talleyrand gave a dry chuckle also.

"Just one word of advice before you go, Monsieur Gerard," said he: "you are now coming into troubled waters, and you might find a worse pilot than myself. We have none of us any idea as to what this little affair means, and, between ourselves, it is very important for us, who have the destinies of France upon our shoulders, to keep ourselves in touch with all that goes on. You understand me, Monsieur Gerard?"

I had not the least idea what he was driving at, but I bowed and tried to look as if it was clear to me.

"Act very guardedly, then, and say nothing to anybody," said Talleyrand. "Colonel de Lasalle and I will not show ourselves in public with you, but we will await you here, and we will give you our advice when you have told us what has passed between the Emperor and yourself. It is time that you started now, for the Emperor never forgives unpunctuality."

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Off I went on foot to the palace, which was only a hundred paces off. I made my way to the ante-chamber, where Duroc, with his grand new scarlet-and-gold coat, was fussing about among the crowd of people who were waiting.

I heard him whisper to Monsieur de Caulaincourt that half of them were German Dukes who expected to be made Kings, and the other half German Dukes who expected to be made paupers. Duroc, when he heard my name, showed me straight in, and I found myself in the Emperor's presence.

I had, of course, seen him in camp a hundred times, but I had never been face to face with him before. I have no doubt that if you had met him without knowing in the least who he was, you would simply have said that he was a sallow little fellow with a good forehead and fairly well-turned calves.

His tight white cashmere breeches and white stockings showed off his legs to advantage. But even a stranger must have been struck by the singular look of his eyes, which could harden into an expression which would frighten a grenadier. It is said that even Auguereau, who was a man who had never known what fear was, quailed before Napoleon's gaze, at a time, too, when the Emperor was but an unknown soldier.

He looked mildly enough at me, however, and motioned me to remain by the door. De Meneval was writing to his dictation, looking up at him between each sentence with his spaniel eyes.

"That will do. You can go," said the Emperor abruptly. Then when the secretary had left the room, he strode across with his hands behind his back, and he looked me up and down without a word. Though he was a small man himself, he was very fond of having fine-looking fellows about him, and so I think that my appearance gave him pleasure.

For my own part, I raised one hand to the salute and held the other upon the hilt of my sabre, looking straight ahead of me, as a soldier should.

"Well, Monsieur Gerard," said he at last, tapping his forefinger upon one of the brandenburgs of gold braid upon the front of my pelisse, "I am informed that you are a very deserving young officer. Your Colonel gives me an excellent account of you."

I wished to make a brilliant reply, but I could think of nothing save Lasalle's phrase that I was all spurs and moustaches, so it ended in my saying nothing at all. The Emperor watched the struggle which must have shown itself upon my features, and when, finally, no answer came he did not appear to be displeased.

"I believe that you are the very man I want," said he. "Brave and clever men surround me upon every side. But a brave man

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who—" He did not finish his sentence, and for my own part I could not understand what he was driving at. I contented myself with assuring him that he could count upon me to the death.

"You are, as I understand, a good swordsman?" said he.

"Tolerable, sire," I answered.

"You were chosen by your regiment to fight the champion of the Hussars of Chambarant?" said he.

I was not sorry to find that he knew so much of my exploits.

"My comrades, sire, did me that honour," said I.

"And for the sake of practice you challenged six fencing-masters in the week before your duel?"

"I had the privilege of being out seven times in as many days, sire," said I.

"And escaped without a scratch?".

"The fencing master of the 23rd Light Infantry touched me on the left elbow, sire."

"Let us have no more child's play of the sort, monsieur," he cried, turning suddenly to that cold rage of his which was so appalling.

"Do you imagine that I place veteran soldiers in these positions that you may practise quarte and tierce upon them? How am I to face Europe if my soldiers turn their points upon each other? Another word of your duelling, and I break you between these fingers."

I saw his plump white hands flash before my eyes as he spoke, and his voice had turned to the most discordant hissing and growling. My skin prickled all over as I listened to him, and I would gladly have changed my position for that of the first man in the steepest and narrowest breach that ever swallowed up a storming party.

He turned to the table, drank off a cup of coffee, and then when he faced me again every trace of this storm had vanished, and he wore that singular smile which came from his lips but never from his eyes.

"I have need of your services, Monsieur Gerard," said he. "I may be safer with a good sword at my side, and there are reasons why yours should be the one which I select. But first of all I must bind you to secrecy. Whilst I live, what passes between us today must be known to none but ourselves."

I thought of Talleyrand and Lasalle, but I promised.

"In the next place, I do not want your opinions or conjectures, and I wish you to do exactly what you are told."

I bowed.

"It is your sword that I need, and not your brains. I will do the thinking. Is that clear to you?"

"Yes, sire."

"You know the Chancellor's Grove, in the forest?"

I bowed.

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"You know also the large double fir tree where the hounds assembled on Tuesday?"

Had he known that I met a girl under it three times a week, he would not have asked me. I bowed once more without remark.

"Very good. You will meet me there at ten o'clock tonight."

I had got past being surprised at anything which might happen. If he had asked me to take his place upon the Imperial throne I could only have nodded my busby.

"We shall then proceed into the wood together," said the Emperor. "You will be armed with a sword, but not with pistols. You must address no remark to me, and I shall say nothing to you. We will advance in silence. You understand?"

"I understand, sire."

"After a time we shall see a man, or more probably two men, under a certain tree. We shall approach them together. If I signal to you to defend me, you will have your sword ready. If, on the other hand, I speak to these men, you will wait and see what happens. If you are called upon to draw, you must see that neither of them, in the event of their being two, escapes from us. I shall myself assist you."

"Sire," I cried, "I have no doubt that two would not be too many for my sword; but would it not be better that I should bring a comrade than that you should be forced to join in such a struggle?"

"Ta, ta, ta," said he. "I was a soldier before I was an Emperor. Do you think, then, that artillerymen have not swords as well as the hussars? But I ordered you not to argue with me. You will do exactly what I tell you. If swords are once out, neither of these men is to get away alive."

"They shall not, sire," said I.

"Very good. I have no more instructions for you. You can go."

I turned to the door, and then, an idea occurring to me, I turned.

"I have been thinking, sire—" said I.

He sprang at me with the ferocity of a wild beast. I really thought he would have struck me.

"Thinking!" he cried. "You, *you*! Do you imagine I chose you out because you could think? Let me hear of your doing such a thing again! You, the one man—but, there! You meet me at the fir tree at ten o'clock."

My faith, I was right glad to get out of the room. If I have a good horse under me, and a sword clanking against my stirrup-iron, I know where I am. And in all that relates to green fodder or dry, barley and oats and rye, and the handling of squadrons upon the march, there is no one who can teach me very much.

But when I meet a Chamberlain and a Marshal of the Palace,

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and have to pick my words with an Emperor, and find that everybody hints instead of talking straight out, I feel like a troop-horse who has been put in a lady's *calèche*. It is not my trade, all this mincing and pretending. I have learned the manners of a gentleman, but never those of a courtier.

I was right glad then to get into the fresh air again, and I ran away up to my quarters like a school-boy who has just escaped from the seminary master.

But as I opened the door, the very first thing that my eye rested upon was a long pair of sky-blue legs with hussar boots, and a short pair of black ones with knee breeches and buckles. They both sprang up together to greet me.

"Well, what news?" they cried, the two of them.

"None," I answered.

"The Emperor refused to see you?"

"No, I have seen him."

"And what did he say?"

"Monsieur de Talleyrand," I answered, "I regret to say that it is quite impossible for me to tell you anything about it. I have promised the Emperor."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear young man," said he, sidling up to me, as a cat does when it is about to rub itself against you. "This is all among friends, you understand, and goes no farther than these four walls. Besides, the Emperor never meant to include me in this promise."

"It is but a minute's walk to the palace, Monsieur de Talleyrand," I answered; "if it would not be troubling you too much to ask you to step up to it and bring back the Emperor's written statement that he did not mean to include you in this promise, I shall be happy to tell you every word that passed."

He showed his teeth at me then like the old fox that he was.

"Monsieur Gerard appears to be a little puffed up," said he. "He is too young to see things in their just proportion. As he grows older he may understand that it is not always very discreet for a subaltern of cavalry to give such very abrupt refusals."

I did not know what to say to this, but Lasalle came to my aid in his downright fashion.

"The lad is quite right," said he. "If I had known that there was a promise I should not have questioned him. You know very well, Monsieur de Talleyrand, that if he had answered you, you would have laughed in your sleeve and thought as much about him as I think of the bottle when the burgundy is gone. As for me, I promise you that the Tenth would have had no room for him, and that we should have lost our best swordsman if I had heard him give up the Emperor's secret."

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But the statesman became only the more bitter when he saw that I had the support of my Colonel.

"I have heard, Colonel de Lasalle," said he, with an icy dignity, "that your opinion is of great weight upon the subject of light cavalry. Should I have occasion to seek information about that branch of the army, I shall be very happy to apply to you.

"At present, however, the matter concerns diplomacy, and you will permit me to form my own views upon that question. As long as the welfare of France and the safety of the Emperor's person are largely committed to my care, I will use every means in my power to secure them, even if it should be against the Emperor's own temporary wishes. I have the honour, Colonel de Lasalle, to wish you a very good day!"

He shot a most unamiable glance in my direction, and, turning upon his heel, he walked with little, quick, noiseless steps out of the room.

I could see from Lasalle's face that he did not at all relish finding himself at enmity with the powerful Minister. He rapped out an oath or two, and then, catching up his sabre and his cap, he clattered away down the stairs. As I looked out of the window I saw the two of them, the big blue man and the limping black one, going up the street together. Talleyrand was walking very rigidly, and Lasalle was waving his hands and talking, so I suppose he was trying to make his peace.

The Emperor had told me not to think, and I endeavoured to obey him. I took up the cards from the table where Morat had left them, and I tried to work out a few combinations at *écarté*. But I could not remember which were trumps, and I threw them under the table in despair. Then I drew my sabre and practised giving point until I was weary, but it was all of no use at all. My mind *would* work, in spite of myself. At ten o'clock I was to meet the Emperor in the forest.

Of all extraordinary combinations of events in the whole world, surely this was the last which would have occurred to me when I rose from my couch that morning. But the responsibility—the dreadful responsibility! It was all upon my shoulders. There was no one to halve it with me. It made me cold all over.

Often as I have faced death upon the battle-field, I have never known what real fear was until that moment. But then I considered that after all I could but do my best like a brave and honourable gentleman, and above all obey the orders which I had received, to the very letter. And, if all went well, this would surely be the foundation of my fortunes.

Thus, swaying between my fears and my hopes, I spent the long, long evening until it was time to keep my appointment.

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I put on my military overcoat, as I did not know how much of the night I might have to spend in the woods, and I fastened my sword outside it. I pulled off my hussar boots also, and wore a pair of shoes and gaiters, that I might be lighter upon my feet. Then I stole out of my quarters and made for the forest, feeling very much easier in my mind, for I am always at my best when the time of thought has passed and the moment for action arrived.

I passed the barracks of the Chasseurs of the Guards, and the line of cafés all filled with uniforms. I caught a glimpse as I went by of the blue and gold of some of my comrades, amid the swarm of dark infantry coats and the light green of the Guides. There they sat, sipping their wine and smoking their cigars, little dreaming what their comrade had on hand.

One of them, the chief of my squadron, caught sight of me in the lamplight, and came shouting after me into the street. I hurried on, however, pretending not to hear him, so he, with a curse at my deafness, went back at last to his wine bottle.

It is not very hard to get into the forest at Fontainebleau. The scattered trees steal their way into the very streets, like the *tirailleurs* in front of a column. I turned into a path, which led to the edge of the woods, and then I pushed rapidly forward towards the old fir tree.

It was a place which, as I have hinted, I had my own reasons for knowing well, and I could only thank the Fates that it was not one of the nights upon which Léonie would be waiting for me. The poor child would have died of terror at sight of the Emperor. He might have been too harsh with her—and worse still, he might have been too kind.

There was a half-moon shining, and, as I came up to our trysting-place, I saw that I was not the first to arrive. The Emperor was pacing up and down, his hands behind him and his face sunk somewhat forward upon his breast. He wore a grey greatcoat with a *capote* over his head. I had seen him in such a dress in our winter campaign in Poland, and it was said that he used it because the hood was such an excellent disguise.

He was always fond, whether in the camp or in Paris, of walking round at night, and overhearing the talk of the cabarets or round the fires. His figure, however, and his way of carrying his head and his hands were so well known that he was always recognized, and then the talkers would say whatever they thought would please him best.

My first thought was that he would be angry with me for having kept him waiting, but as I approached him, we heard the big church clock of Fontainebleau clang out the hour of ten. It was evident, therefore, that it was he who was too soon, and not I too late. I

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remembered his order that I should make no remark, so contented myself with halting within four paces of him, clicking my spurs together, grounding my sabre, and saluting.

He glanced at me, and then without a word he turned and walked slowly through the forest, I keeping always about the same distance behind him.

Once or twice he seemed to me to look apprehensively to right and to left, as if he feared that someone was observing us. I looked also, but although I have the keenest sight, it was quite impossible to see anything except the ragged patches of moonshine between the great black shadows of the trees. My ears are as quick as my eyes, and once or twice I thought that I heard a twig crack ; but you know how many sounds there are in a forest at night, and how difficult it is even to say what direction they come from.

We walked for rather more than a mile, and I knew exactly what our destination was, long before we got there. In the centre of one of the glades, there is the shattered stump of what must at some time have been a most gigantic tree. It is called the Abbot's Beech, and there are so many ghostly stories about it, that I know many a brave soldier who would not care about mounting sentinel over it.

However, I cared as little for such folly as the Emperor did, so we crossed the glade and made straight for the old broken trunk. As we approached it, I saw that two men were waiting for us beneath it.

When I first caught sight of them they were standing rather behind it, as if they were not anxious to be seen, but as we came nearer they emerged from its shadow and walked forward to meet us. The Emperor glanced back at me, and slackened his pace a little so that I came within arm's length of him. You may think that I had my hilt well to the front, and that I had a very good look at these two people who were approaching us.

The one was tall, remarkably so, and of very spare frame, while the other was rather below the usual height, and had a brisk, determined way of walking. They both wore black cloaks, which were slung right across their figures, and hung down upon one side, like the mantles of Murat's dragoons. They had flat black caps, like those I have since seen in Spain, which threw their faces into darkness, though I could see the gleam of their eyes from beneath them.

With the moon behind them and their long black shadows walking in front, they were such figures as one might expect to meet at night near the Abbot's Beech. I can remember that they had a stealthy way of moving, and that as they approached, the moonshine formed two white diamonds between their legs and the legs of their shadows.

The Emperor had paused, and these two strangers came to a

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stand also within a few paces of us. I had drawn up close to my companion's elbow, so that the four of us were facing each other without a word spoken. My eyes were particularly fixed upon the taller one, because he was slightly the nearer to me, and I became certain as I watched him that he was in the last state of nervousness. His lean figure was quivering all over, and I heard a quick, thin panting like that of a tired dog.

Suddenly one of them gave a short, hissing signal. The tall man bent his back and his knees like a diver about to spring, but before he could move, I had jumped with drawn sabre in front of him. At the same instant the smaller man bounded past me, and buried a long poniard in the Emperor's heart.

My God, the horror of that moment! It is a marvel that I did not drop dead myself. As in a dream, I saw the grey coat whirl convulsively round, and caught a glimpse in the moonlight of three inches of red point which jutted out from between the shoulders.

Then down he fell with a dead man's gasp upon the grass, and the assassin, leaving his weapon buried in his victim, threw up both his hands and shrieked with joy. But I—I drove my sword through his midriff with such frantic force, that the mere blow of the hilt against the end of his breast-bone sent him six paces before he fell, and left my reeking blade ready for the other.

I sprang round upon him with such a lust for blood upon me as I had never felt, and never have felt, in all my days. As I turned, a dagger flashed before my eyes, and I felt the cold wind of it pass my neck and the villain's wrist jar upon my shoulder. I shortened my sword, but he winced away from me, and an instant afterwards was in full flight, bounding like a deer across the glade in the moonlight.

But he was not to escape me thus. I knew that the murderer's poniard had done its work. Young as I was, I had seen enough of war to know a mortal blow. I paused but for an instant to touch the cold hand.

"Sire! Sire!" I cried, in an agony; and then as no sound came back and nothing moved, save an ever-widening dark circle in the moonlight, I knew that all was indeed over. I sprang madly to my feet, threw off my greatcoat, and ran at the top of my speed after the remaining assassin.

Ah, how I blessed the wisdom which had caused me to come in shoes and gaiters! And the happy thought which had thrown off my coat. He could not get rid of his mantle, this wretch, or else he was too frightened to think of it. So it was that I gained upon him from the beginning.

He must have been out of his wits, for he never tried to bury himself in the darker parts of the woods, but he flew on from glade

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to glade, until he came to the heath-land which leads up to the great Fontainebleau quarry. There I had him in full sight, and knew that he could not escape me.

He ran well, it is true—ran as a coward runs when his life is the stake. But I ran as Destiny runs when it gets behind a man's heels. Yard by yard I drew in upon him. He was rolling and staggering. I could hear the rasping and crackling of his breath. The great gulf of the quarry suddenly yawned in front of his path, and glancing at me over his shoulder, he gave a shriek of despair. The next instant he had vanished from my sight.

Vanished utterly, you understand. I rushed to the spot, and gazed down into the black abyss. Had he hurled himself over? I had almost made up my mind that he had done so, when a gentle sound rising and falling came out of the darkness beneath me. It was his breathing once more, and it showed me where he must be. He was hiding in the tool-house.

At the edge of the quarry and beneath the summit there is a small platform upon which stands a wooden hut for the use of the labourers. It was into this, then, that he had darted. Perhaps he had thought, the fool, that, in the darkness, I would not venture to follow him. He little knew Etienne Gerard.

With a spring I was on the platform, with another I was through the doorway, and then, hearing him in the corner, I hurled myself down upon the top of him.

He fought like a wild cat, but he never had a chance with his shorter weapon. I think that I must have transfixed him with that first mad lunge, for, though he struck and struck, his blows had no power in them, and presently his dagger tinkled down upon the floor.

When I was sure that he was dead, I rose up and passed out into the moonlight. I climbed on to the heath again, and wandered across it as nearly out of my mind as a man could be.

With the blood singing in my ears, and my naked sword still clutched in my hand, I walked aimlessly on until, looking round me, I found that I had come as far as the glade of the Abbot's Beech, and saw in the distance that gnarled stump which must ever be associated with the most terrible moment of my life. I sat down upon a fallen trunk with my sword across my knees and my head between my hands, and I tried to think about what had happened and what would happen in the future.

The Emperor had committed himself to my care. The Emperor was dead.

Those were the two thoughts which clanged in my head, until I had no room for any other ones. He had come with me and he was dead. I had done what he had ordered when living. I had revenged him when dead. But what of all that?

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The world would look upon me as responsible. They might even look upon me as the assassin. What could I prove? What witnesses had I? Might I not have been the accomplice of these wretches? Yes, yes, I was eternally dishonoured—the lowest, most despicable creature in all France. This, then, was the end of my fine military ambitions—of the hopes of my mother.

I laughed bitterly at the thought. And what was I to do now? Was I to go into Fontainebleau, to wake up the palace, and to inform them that the great Emperor had been murdered within a pace of me? I could not do it—no, I could not do it!

There was but one course for an honourable gentleman whom Fate had placed in so cruel a position. I would fall upon my dishonoured sword, and so share, since I could not avert, the Emperor's fate. I rose with my nerves strung to this last piteous deed, and as I did so, my eyes fell upon something which struck the breath from my lips. The Emperor was standing before me!

He was not more than ten yards off, with the moon shining straight upon his cold, pale face. He wore his grey overcoat, but the hood was turned back, and the front open, so that I could see the green coat of the Guides, and the white breeches. His hands were clasped behind his back, and his chin sunk forward upon his breast, in the way that was usual with him.

"Well," said he, in his hardest and most abrupt voice, "what account do you give of yourself?"

I believe that, if he had stood in silence for another minute, my brain would have given way. But those sharp military accents were exactly what I needed to bring me to myself. Living or dead, here was the Emperor standing before me and asking me questions. I sprang to the salute.

"You have killed one, I see," said he, jerking his head towards the beech.

"Yes, sire."

"And the other escaped?"

"No, sire, I killed him also."

"What!" he cried. "Do I understand that you have killed them both?" He approached me as he spoke with a smile which set his teeth gleaming in the moonlight.

"One body lies there, sire," I answered. "The other is in the tool-house at the quarry."

"Then the Brothers of Ajaccio are no more," he cried, and after a pause, as if speaking to himself, "The shadow has passed from me for ever." Then he bent forward and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"You have done very well, my young friend," said he. "You have lived up to your reputation."

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He was flesh and blood, then, this Emperor. I could feel the little, plump palm that rested upon me. And yet I could not get over what I had seen with my own eyes, and so I stared at him in such bewilderment that he broke once more into one of his smiles.

"No, no, Monsieur Gerard," said he, "I am not a ghost, and you have not seen me killed! You will come here, and all will be clear to you."

He turned as he spoke, and led the way towards the great beech stump.

The bodies were still lying upon the ground, and two men were standing beside them. As we approached I saw from the turbans that they were Roustem and Mustafa, the two Mameluke servants. The Emperor paused when he came to the grey figure upon the ground, and turning back the hood which shrouded the features, he showed a face which was very different from his own.

"Here lies a faithful servant who has given up his life for his master," said he. "Monsieur de Goudin resembles me in figure and in manner, as you must admit."

What a delirium of joy came upon me when these few words made everything clear to me. He smiled again as he saw the delight which urged me to throw my arms round him and to embrace him, but he moved a step away, as if he had divined my impulse.

"You are unhurt?" he asked.

"I am unhurt, sire. But in another minute I should in my despair—"

"Tut, tut!" he interrupted. "You did very well. He should himself have been more on his guard. I saw everything which passed."

"You saw it, sire!"

"You did not hear me follow you through the wood, then? I hardly lost sight of you from the moment that you left your quarters until poor De Goudin fell. The counterfeit Emperor was in front of you and the real one behind. You will now escort me back to the palace."

He whispered an order to his Mamelukes, who saluted in silence and remained where they were standing. For my part, I followed the Emperor with my pelisse bursting with pride. My word, I have always carried myself as a hussar should, but Lasalle himself never strutted and swung his dolman as I did that night.

Who should clink his spurs and clatter his sabre if it were not I—I, Etienne Gerard—the confidant of the Emperor, the chosen swordsman of the light cavalry, the man who slew the would-be assassins of Napoleon? But he noticed my bearing and turned upon me like a blight.

"Is that the way you carry yourself on a secret mission?" he

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hissed, with that cold glare in his eyes. "Is it thus that you will make your comrades believe that nothing remarkable has occurred? Have done with this nonsense, monsieur, or you will find yourself transferred to the sappers, where you would have harder work and duller plumage."

That was the way with the Emperor. If ever he thought that anyone might have a claim upon him, he took the first opportunity to show him the gulf that lay between. I saluted and was silent, but I must confess to you that it hurt me after all that had passed between us.

He led on to the palace, where we passed through the side door and up into his own cabinet.

There were a couple of grenadiers at the staircase, and their eyes started out from under their fur caps, I promise you, when they saw a young lieutenant of hussars going up to the Emperor's room at midnight.

I stood by the door, as I had done in the afternoon, while he flung himself down in an armchair, and remained silent so long that it seemed to me that he had forgotten all about me. I ventured at last upon a slight cough to remind him.

"Ah, Monsieur Gerard," said he, "you are very curious no doubt, as to the meaning of all this?"

"I am quite content, sire, if it is your pleasure not to tell me," I answered.

"Ta, ta, ta," said he, impatiently. "These are only words. The moment that you were outside that door you would begin making inquiries about what it means.

"In two days your brother officers would know about it, in three days it would be all over Fontainebleau, and it would be in Paris on the fourth. Now, if I tell you enough to appease your curiosity, there is some reasonable hope that you may be able to keep the matter to yourself."

He did not understand me, this Emperor, and yet I could only bow and be silent.

"A few words will make it clear to you," said he, speaking very swiftly and pacing up and down the room.

"They were Corsicans, these two men. I had known them in my youth. We had belonged to the same society—Brothers of Ajaccio, as we called ourselves. It was founded in the old Paoli days, you understand, and we had some strict rules of our own which were not infringed with impunity."

A very grim look came over his face as he spoke, and it seemed to me that all that was French had gone out of him, and that it was the pure Corsican, the man of strong passions and of strange revenges, who stood before me.

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His memory had gone back to those early days of his, and for five minutes, wrapped in thought, he paced up and down the room with his quick little tiger steps. Then with an impatient wave of his hands he came back to his palace and to me.

"The rules of such a society," he continued, "are all very well for a private citizen. In the old days there was no more loyal brother than I. But circumstances change, and it would be neither for my welfare nor for that of France that I should now submit myself to them. They wanted to hold me to it, and so brought their fate upon their own heads.

"These were the two chiefs of the order, and they had come from Corsica to summon me to meet them at the spot which they named.

"I knew what such a summons meant. No man had ever returned from obeying one. On the other hand, if I did not go, I was sure that disaster would follow. I am a brother myself, you remember, and I know their ways."

Again there came that hardening of his mouth and cold glitter of his eyes.

"You perceive my dilemma, Monsieur Gerard," said he. "How would you have acted yourself, under such circumstances?"

"Given the word to the 10th Hussars, sire," I cried. "Patrols could have swept the woods from end to end, and brought these two rascals to your feet."

He smiled, but he shook his head.

"I had very excellent reasons why I did not wish them taken alive," said he. "You can understand that an assassin's tongue might be as dangerous a weapon as an assassin's dagger. I will not disguise from you that I wished to avoid scandal at all cost. That was why I ordered you to take no pistols with you. That also is why my Mamelukes will remove all traces of the affair, and nothing more will be heard about it. I thought of all possible plans, and I am convinced that I selected the best one.

"Had I sent more than one guard with De Goudin into the woods, then the brothers would not have appeared. They would not change their plans nor miss their chance for the sake of a single man.

"It was Colonel Lasalle's accidental presence at the moment when I received the summons which led to my choosing one of his hussars for the mission.

"I selected you, Monsieur Gerard, because I wanted a man who could handle a sword, and who would not pry more deeply into the affair than I desired.

"I trust that, in this respect, you will justify my choice as well as you have done in your bravery and skill."

"Sire," I answered, "you may rely upon it."

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"As long as I live," said he, "you never open your lips upon this subject."

"I dismiss it entirely from my mind, sire. I will efface it from my recollection as if it had never been. I will promise you to go out of your cabinet at this moment exactly as I was when I entered it at four o'clock."

"You cannot do that," said the Emperor, smiling. "You were a lieutenant at that time. You will permit me, Captain, to wish you a very good night."

* * *

TREE OF FABLE

Put out the lights now !
Look at the Tree, the rough tree dazzled
In oriole plumes of flame,
Tinselled with twinkling frost fire, tasselled
With stars and moons—the same
That yesterday hid in the spinney and had no fame
Till we put out the lights now.

Hard are the nights now :
The fields at moonrise turn to agate,
Shadows are cold as jet ;
In dyke and furrow, in copse and faggot
The frost's tooth is set ;
And stars are the sparks whirled out by the north wind's fret
On the flinty nights now.

So feast your eyes now
On the mimic star and the moon-cold bauble :
Worlds may wither unseen
But the Christmas Tree is a tree of fable,
A phœnix in evergreen,
And the world cannot change or chill what its mysteries mean
To your hearts and eyes now.

The vision dies now
Candle by candle : the tree that embraced it
Returns to its own kind,
To be earthed again and weather as best it
May the frost and the wind.
Children, it too had its hour—you will not mind
If it lives or dies now.

C. Day Lewis

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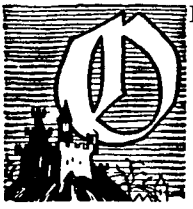
The 13 Clocks



NCE upon a time, in a gloomy castle on a lonely hill, where there were thirteen clocks that wouldn't go, there lived a cold, aggressive Duke, and his niece, the Princess Saralinda. She was warm in every wind and weather, but he was always cold. His hands were as cold as his smile and almost as cold as his heart. He wore gloves when he was asleep, and he wore gloves when he was awake, which made it difficult for him to pick up pins or coins or the kernels of nuts, or to tear the wings from nightingales. He was six feet four, and forty-six, and even colder than he thought he was.

One eye wore a velvet patch ; the other glittered through a monocle, which made half his body seem closer to you than the other half. He had lost one eye when he was twelve, for he was fond of peering into nests and lairs in search of birds and animals to maul. One afternoon, a mother shrike had mauled him first. His nights were spent in evil dreams, and his days were given to wicked schemes.

Wickedly scheming, he would limp and cackle through the cold corridors of the castle, planning new impossible feats for the suitors of Saralinda to perform. He did not wish to give her hand in marriage, since her hand was the only warm hand in the castle. Even the hands of his watch and the hands of all the thirteen clocks were frozen. They had all frozen at the same time, on a snowy night, seven years before, and after that it was always ten minutes to five in the castle. Travellers and mariners would look up at the gloomy castle on the

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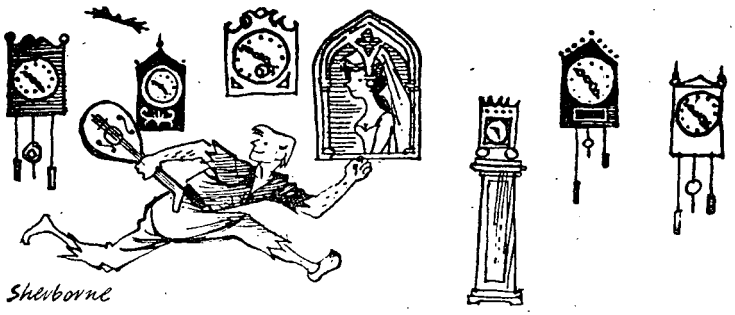

by JAMES THURBER

lonely hill and say, "Time lies frozen there. It's always Then. It's never Now."

The cold Duke was afraid of Now, for Now has warmth and urgency, and Then is dead and buried. Now might bring a certain knight of gay and shining courage—"But, no!" the cold Duke muttered. "The Prince will break himself against a new and awful labour: a place too high to reach, a thing too far to find, a burden too heavy to lift."

The Duke was afraid of Now, but he tampered with the clocks to see if they would go, out of a strange perversity, praying that they wouldn't. Tinkers and tinkerers and a few wizards who happened by tried to start the clocks with tools or magic words, or by shaking them and cursing, but nothing whirred or ticked.

The clocks were dead, and in the end, brooding on it, the Duke decided he had murdered time, slain it with his sword, and wiped his bloody blade upon its beard and left it lying there, bleeding hours and minutes, its springs uncoiled and sprawling, its pendulum disintegrating.

The Duke limped because his legs were of different lengths. The right one had outgrown the left because, when he was young, he had spent his mornings kicking pups and punting kittens. He would say to a suitor, "What is the difference in the length of my legs?" and if the youth replied, "Why, one is shorter than the other," the Duke would run him through with the sword he carried in his sword-cane and feed him to the geese. The suitor was supposed to say, "Why, one is longer than the other."

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Many a prince had been run through for naming the wrong difference. Others had been slain for offences equally trivial : trampling the Duke's camellias, failing to praise his wines, staring too long at his gloves, gazing too long at his niece.

Those who survived his scorn and sword were given incredible labours to perform in order to win his niece's hand, the only warm hand in the castle, where time had frozen to death at ten minutes to five one snowy night. They were told to cut a slice of moon, or change the ocean into wine. They were set to finding things that never were, and building things that could not be. They came and tried and failed and disappeared and never came again.

And some, as I have said, were slain, for using names that start with X, or dropping spoons, or wearing rings, or speaking disrespectfully of sin.

The castle and the Duke grew colder, and Saralinda, as a princess will, even in a place where time lies frozen, became a little older, but only a little older. She was nearly twenty-one the day a prince, disguised as a minstrel, came singing to the town that lay below the castle. He called himself Xingu, which was not his name, and dangerous, since the name began with X—and still does. He was, quite properly, a thing of shreds and patches, a ragged minstrel, singing for pennies and the love of singing.

Xingu, as he so rashly called himself, was the youngest son of a powerful king, but he had grown weary of rich attire and banquets and tournaments and the available princesses of his own realm, and yearned to find in a far land the maiden of his dreams, singing as he went, learning the life of the lowly, and possibly slaying a dragon here and there.

At the sign of the Silver Swan, in the town below the castle, where taverners, travellers, tale-tellers, tosspots, trouble-makers, and other townspeople were gathered, he heard of Saralinda, loveliest princess on all the thousand islands of the ocean seas. " If you can turn the rain to silver, she is yours," a taverner leered.

" If you can slay the thorny Boar of Borythorn, she is yours," grinned a traveller. " But there is no thorny Boar of Borythorn, which makes it hard."

" What makes it even harder is her uncle's scorn and sword," sneered a tale-teller. " He will slit you from your guggle to your zatch."

" The Duke is seven feet, nine inches tall, and only twenty-eight years old, or in his prime," a tosspot gurgled. " His hand is cold enough to stop a clock, and strong enough to choke a bull, and swift enough to catch the wind. He breaks up minstrels in his soup, like cracker biscuits."

" Our minstrel here will warm the old man's heart with song, dazzle him with jewels and gold," a trouble-maker simpered. " He'll trample on the Duke's camellias, spill his wine, and blunt his sword, and say his name begins with X, and in the end the Duke will say, ' Take Saralinda, with my blessing, O lordly Prince of Rags and Tags, O rider of the sun ! ' "

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The trouble-maker weighed eighteen stone, but the minstrel picked him up and tossed him in the air and caught him and set him down again. Then he paid his due and left the Swan.

"I've seen that youth before," the traveller mused, staring after Xingu, "but he was neither ragamuffin then, nor minstrel. Now let me see, where was it?"

"In his soup," the tosspot said, "like crackers."

Outside the tavern the night was lighted by a rocking yellow moon that held a white star in its horn. In the gloomy castle on the hill a lantern gleamed and darkened, came and went, as if the gaunt Duke stalked from room to room, stabbing bats and spiders, killing mice.

"Dazzle the Duke with jewels," the minstrel said aloud. "There's something in it somewhere, but what it is and where, I cannot think."

He wondered if the Duke would order him to cause a fall of purple snow, or make a table out of sawdust, or merely slit him from his guggle to his zatch, and say to Saralinda, "There he lies, your latest fool, a nameless minstrel. I'll have my varlets feed him to the geese." The minstrel shuddered in the moonlight, wondering where his zatch and guggle were.

He wondered how and why and when he could invade the castle. A duke was never known to ask a ragged minstrel to his table, or set a task for him to do, or let him meet a princess. "I'll think of some way," thought the Prince. "I'll think of something."

The hour was late, and revellers began to reel and stagger home from inns and taverns, none in rags, and none in tags, and some in velvet gowns. One third of the dogs in the town began to bark. The minstrel took his lute from his shoulder and improvised a song. He had thought of something.

"Hark, hark, the dogs do bark,
But only one in three.
They bark at those in velvet gowns,
They never bark at me."

A tale-teller, tottering home to bed, laughed at the song, and trouble-makers and tosspots began to gather and listen.

"The Duke is fond of velvet gowns,
He'll ask you all to tea.
But I'm in rags, and I'm in tags,
He'll never send for me."

The townspeople crowded around the minstrel, laughing and cheering. "He's a bold one, Rags is, makin' songs about the Duke!" giggled a strut-furrow who had joined the crowd. The minstrel went on singing.

"Hark, hark, the dogs do bark,
The Duke is fond of kittens.
He likes to take their insides out,
And use their fur for mittens."

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The crowd fell silent in awe and wonder, for the townspeople knew the Duke had slain eleven men for merely staring at his hands, hands that were gloved in velvet gloves, bright with rubies and with diamonds. Fearing to be seen in the doomed and desperate company of the mad minstrel, the revellers slunk off to their homes to tell their wives. Only the traveller, who thought he had seen the singer some otherwhere and time, lingered to warn him of his peril.

"I've seen you shining in the lists," he said, "or toppling knights in battle, or breaking men in two like crackers. You must be Tristram's son, or Lancelot's, or are you Tyne or Tora?"

"A wandering minstrel, I," the minstrel said, "a thing of shreds and zatches." He bit his tongue in consternation at the slip it made.

"Even if you were the mighty Zorn of Zorna," said the man, "you could not escape the fury of the Duke. He'll slit you from your guggle to your zatch, from here to here." He touched the minstrel's stomach and his throat.

"I now know what to guard," the minstrel sighed.

A black figure in velvet mask and hood and cloak disappeared behind a tree. "The cold Duke's spy-in-chief," the traveller said, "a man named Whisper. Tomorrow he will die."

The minstrel waited. "He'll die because, to name your sins, he'll have to mention mittens. I leave at once for other lands, since I have mentioned mittens." He sighed.

"You'll never live to wed his niece. You'll only die to feed his geese. Good-bye, good night, and sorry." The traveller vanished, like a fly in the mouth of a frog, and the minstrel was left alone in the dark, deserted street.

Somewhere a clock dropped a stony chime into the night. The minstrel began to sing again. A soft finger touched his shoulder and he turned to see a little man smiling in the moonlight. He wore an indescribable hat, his eyes were wide and astonished, as if everything were happening for the first time, and he had a dark, describable beard.

"If you have nothing better than your songs," he said, "you are somewhat less than much, and only a little more than anything."

"I manage in my fashion," the minstrel said, and he strummed his lute and sang.

"Hark, hark, the dogs do bark,
The cravens are going to bed.
Some will rise and greet the sun,
But Whisper will be dead."

The old man lost his smile. "Who are you?" the minstrel asked.

"I am the Golux," said the Golux, proudly, "the only Golux in the world, and not a mere Device."

"You resemble one," the minstrel said, "as Saralinda resembles the rose."

"I resemble only half the things I say I don't," the Golux said. "The other half resemble me." He sighed. "I must always be on hand when people are in peril."

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"My peril is my own," the minstrel said.

"Half of it is yours and half is Saralinda's."

"I hadn't thought of that," the minstrel said. "I place my faith in you, and where you lead, I follow."

"Not so fast," the Golux said. "Half the places I have been to, never were. I make things up. Half the things I say are there cannot be found. When I was young I told a tale of buried gold, and men from leagues around dug in the woods. I dug myself."

"But why?"

"I thought the tale of treasure might be true."

"You said you made it up."

"I know I did, but then I didn't know I had. I forget things, too." The minstrel felt a vague uncertainty.

"I make mistakes, but I am on the side of Good," the Golux said, "by accident and happenchance. I had high hopes of being Evil when I was two, but in my youth I came upon a firefly burning in a spider's web. I saved the victim's life." "The firefly's?" said the minstrel. "The spider's. The blinking arsonist had set the web on fire."

The minstrel's uncertainty increased, but as he thought to slip away, a deep bell sounded in the castle and many lights appeared, and voices shouted orders and commands. A stream of lanterns started flowing down the darkness.

"The Duke has heard your songs," the Golux said. "The fat is in the fire, the die is cast, the jig is up, the goose is cooked, and the cat is out of the bag."

"My hour has struck," the minstrel said. They heard a faint and distant rasping sound, as if a blade of steel were being sharpened on a stone.

"The Duke prepares to feed you to his geese," the Golux said "We must invent a tale to stay his hand."

"What manner of tale?" the minstrel asked.

"A tale," the Golux said, "to make the Duke believe that slaying you would light a light in someone else's heart. He hates a light in people's hearts. So you must say a certain prince and princess can't be wed until the evening of the second day after the Duke has fed you to his geese."

"I wish that you would not keep on saying that," the minstrel said.

"The tale sounds true," the Golux said, "and very like a witch's spell. The Duke has awe of witches' spells. I'm certain he will stay his hand, I think."

The sound of tramping feet came near and nearer. The iron guards of the Duke closed in, their lanterns gleaming and their spears and armour. "Halt!" There was a clang and clanking.

"Do not arrest my friend," the youth implored.

"What friend?" the captain growled.

The minstrel looked around him and about, but there was no one there. A guard guffawed and said, "Maybe he's seen the Golux."

"There isn't any Golux. I have been to school, and know,"

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the captain said. The minstrel's uncertainty increased again. "Fall in!" the captain bawled. "Dress up that line."

"You heard him. Dress it up," the sergeant said. They marched the minstrel to the dungeon in the castle. A stream of lantern light flowed slowly up the hill.

It was morning. The cold Duke gazed out of a window of the castle, as if he were watching flowers in bloom or flying birds. He was watching his varlets feeding Whisper to the geese. He turned away and took three limps and stared at the minstrel, standing in the great hall of the castle, both hands bound behind him.

"What manner of prince is this you speak of, and what manner of maiden does he love, to use a word that makes no sense and has no point?" His voice sounded like iron dropped on velvet.

"A noble prince, a noble lady," the minstrel said. "When they are wed a million people will be glad."

The Duke took his sword out of his sword-cane and stared at it. He limped across and faced his captive, and touched his guggle softly with the point, and touched his zatch, and sighed and frowned, and put the sword away.

"We shall think of some amusing task for you to do," he said. "I do not like your tricks and guile. I think there is no prince or maiden who would wed if I should slay you, but I am neither sure nor certain." He grinned and said again, "We'll think of some amusing task for you to do."

"But I am not a prince," the minstrel said, "and only princes may aspire to Saralinda's hand."

The cold Duke kept on grinning. "Why, then we'll make a prince of you," he said. "The prince of Rags and Jingles." He clapped his gloves together and two varlets appeared without a word or sound.

"Take him to his dungeon," said the Duke. "Feed him water without bread, and bread without water."

The varlets were taking the minstrel out of the great hall when down the marble stairs the Princess Saralinda floated like a cloud. The Duke's eye gleamed like crystal. The minstrel gazed in wonder.

The Princess Saralinda was tall, with freesias in her dark hair, and she wore serenity brightly like the rainbow. It was not easy to tell her mouth from the rose, or her brow from the white lilac. Her voice was faraway music, and her eyes were candles burning on a tranquil night. She moved across the room like wind in violets, and her laughter sparkled on the air, which, from her presence, gained a faint and undreamed fragrance.

The Prince was frozen by her beauty, but not cold, and the Duke, who was cold but not frozen, held up the palms of his gloves, as if she were a fire at which to warm his hands. The minstrel saw the blood come warmly to the lame man's cheeks.

"This thing of rags and tags and tatters will play our little game," he told his niece, his voice like iron on velvet.

"I wish him well," the Princess said.

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The minstrel broke his bonds and took her hand in his, but it was slashed away by the swift cane of the Duke. "Take him to his dungeon now," he said. He stared coldly at the minstrel through his monocle. "You'll find the most amusing bats and spiders there."

"I wish him well," the Princess said again, and the varlets took the minstrel to his dungeon.

When the great iron door of the dungeon clanked behind the minstrel, he found himself alone in blackness. A spider, swinging on a strand of web, swung back and forth. The zickering of bats was echoed by the walls. The minstrel took a step, avoiding snakes, and something squirmed. "Take care," the Golux said, "you're on my foot."

"Why are you here?" the minstrel cried.

"I forgot something. I forgot about the task the Duke will set you."

The minstrel thought of swimming lakes too wide to swim, of turning liquids into stone, or finding boneless creatures made of bone.

"How came you here?" he asked. "And can you leave?"

"I never know," the Golux said. "My mother was a witch, but rather mediocre in her way. When she tried to turn a thing to gold, it turned to clay; and when she changed her rivals into fish, all she ever got was mermaids." The minstrel's heart was insecure. "My father was a wizard," said his friend, "who often cast his spells upon himself, when he was in his cups. Strike a light or light a lantern! Something I have hold of has no head."

The minstrel shuddered. "The task," he said. "You came to tell me."

"I did? Oh, yes. My father lacked the power of concentration, and that is bad for monks and priests, and worse for wizards. Listen. Tell the Duke that you will hunt the Boar, or travel thrice around the moon, or turn November into June. Implore him not to send you out to find a thousand jewels."

"And then?"

"And then he'll send you out to find a thousand jewels."

"But I am poor!" the minstrel cried.

"Come, come," the Golux said. "You're Zorn of Zorna. I had it from a traveller I met. It came to him as he was leaving town. Your father's casks and coffers shine with rubies and with sapphires."

"My father lives in Zorna," said the Prince, "and it would take me nine and ninety days: three and thirty days to go, and three and thirty days to come back here."

"That's six and sixty."

"It always takes my father three and thirty days to make decisions," said the Prince. "In spells and labours a certain time is always set, and I might be at sea when mine expires."

"That's another problem for another day," the Golux said. "Time is for dragonflies and angels. The former live too little and the latter live too long."

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Zorn of Zorna thought awhile and said, "The task seems strange and simple."

"There are no jewels," the Golux said, "within the reach and ranges of this island, except the gems here in this castle. The Duke knows not that you are Zorn of Zorna. He thinks you are a minstrel without a penny or a moonstone. He's fond of jewels. You've seen them on his gloves."

The Prince stepped on a turtle. "The Duke has spies," he said, "who may know who I am."

The Golux sighed. "I may be wrong," he said, "but we must risk and try it."

The Prince sighed in his turn. "I wish you could be surer."

"I wish I could," the Golux said. "My mother was born, I regret to say, only partly in a caul. I've saved a score of princes in my time. I cannot save them all." Something that would have been purple, if there had been light to see it by, scuttled across the floor.

"The Duke might give me only thirty days, or forty-two, to find a thousand jewels," said Zorn of Zorna. "Why should he give me ninety-nine?"

"The way I look at it," the Golux said, "is this. The longer the labour lasts, the longer lasts his gloating. He loves to gloat, you know."

The Prince sat down beside a toad. "My father may have lost his jewels," he said, "or given them away."

"I thought of that," the Golux said. "And I have other plans than one. But now we both must sleep."

They found a corner without creatures and slept until the town clock struck the midnight hour.

Chains clanked and rattled, and the great iron door began to move. "The Duke has sent for you again," the Golux said. "Be careful what you say and what you do."

The great iron door began to open slowly. "When shall I see you next?" Zorn whispered. There was no answer. The Prince groped around in the dark and felt a thing very like a cat, and touched the thing without a head, but he could not find the Golux.

The great iron door was open wide now and the dungeon filled with lantern light.

"The Duke commands your presence," growled a guard. "What was *that*?"

"What was what?"

"I know not," said the guard. "I thought I heard the sound of someone laughing."

"Is the Duke afraid of laughter?" asked the Prince.

"The Duke is not afraid of anything. Not even," said the guard, "the Todal."

"The Todal?"

"The Todal."

"What's the Todal?"

A lock of the guard's hair turned white and his teeth began to chatter. "The Todal looks like a blob of glup," he said. "It makes

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a sound like rabbits screaming, and smells of old, unopened rooms. It's waiting for the Duke to fail in some endeavour, such as setting you a task that you can do."

"And if he sets me one, and I succeed?" the Prince inquired.

"The Blob will glup him," said the guard. "It's an agent of the devil, sent to punish evildoers for having done less evil than they should. I talk too much. Come on. The Duke is waiting."

The Duke sat at one end of a black oak table in the black oak room, lighted by flaming torches that threw red gleams on shields and lances. The Duke's gloves sparkled when he moved his hands. He stared moodily through his monocle at young Prince Zorn. The Duke sneered, which made him even colder. "So you would hunt the Boar," he said, "or travel thrice around the moon, or turn November into June."

He laughed, and a torch went out. "Saralinda in November turns November into June. A cow can travel thrice around the moon, or even more. And *anyone* can merely *hunt* the Boar. I have another plan for you. I thought it up myself last night, while I was killing mice. I'll send you out to find a thousand jewels and bring them back."

The Prince turned pale, or tried to. "A wandering minstrel, I," he said, "a thing of—"

"Rubies and sapphires." The Duke's chuckle sounded like ice cackling in a cauldron.

"For you are Zorn of Zorna," he whispered, softly. "Your father's casks and vaults and coffers shine with jewels. In six and sixty days you could sail to Zorna and return."

"It always takes my father three and thirty days to make decisions," cried the Prince.

The Duke grinned. "That is what I wanted to know, my naïve Prince," he said. "Then you would have me give you nine and ninety days?"

"That would be fair," the Prince replied. "But how do you know that I am Zorn?"

"I have a spy named Hark," the Duke explained, "who found your princely raiment in your quarters in the town and brought it here, with certain signs and seals and signatures, revealing who you are. Go put the raiment on." He pointed to a flight of iron stairs.

"You'll find it in a chamber on whose door a star is turning black. Don it and return. I'll think of beetles while you're gone, and things like that."

The Duke limped to his chair and sat down again, and the Prince started up the iron stairs, wondering where the Golux was. He stopped and turned and said, "You will not give me nine and ninety days. How many, then?" The Duke sneered. "I'll think of a lovely number," he said. "Go on."

When Zorn came back he wore his royal attire, but the Duke's spies had sealed his sword, so that he could not draw it. The Duke sat staring at a man who wore a velvet mask and cloak and hood.

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"This is Hark," he said, "and this is Listen." He gestured with his cane at nothing.

"There's no one there," said Zorn.

"Listen is invisible," the Duke explained. "Listen can be heard, but never seen. They are here to learn the mark and measure of your task. I give you nine and ninety *hours*, not nine and ninety days, to find a thousand jewels and bring them here. When you return, the clocks must all be striking five."

"The clocks here in the castle?" asked the Prince. "The thirteen clocks?"

"The clocks here in the castle," said the Duke, "the thirteen clocks."

The Prince looked at the two clocks on the walls. Their hands pointed to ten minutes to five.

"The hands are frozen," said the Prince. "The clocks are dead."

"Precisely," said the Duke, "and what is more, which makes your task a charming one, there are no jewels that could be found within the space of nine and ninety hours, except those in my vaults, and these." He held his gloves up and they sparkled.

"A pretty task," said Hark.

"Ingenious," said the voice of Listen.

"I thought you'd like it," said the Duke. "Unseal his sword." Invisible hands unsealed the Prince's sword.

"And if I should succeed?" asked Zorn.

The Duke waved a gloved hand at the iron stairs, and Zorn saw Saralinda standing there.

"I wish him well," she said, and her uncle laughed and looked at Zorn.

"I hired a witch," he said, "to cast a tiny spell upon her. When she is in my presence, all that she can say is this: 'I wish him well.' You like it?"

"A clever spell," said Hark.

"An awful spell," the voice of Listen said.

The Prince and Princess spoke a silent language with their eyes, until the Duke cried, "Go!" and Saralinda vanished up the stairs.

"And if I fail?" asked Zorn.

The Duke removed his sword from his sword-cane and ran his glove along the blade. "I'll slit you from your guggle to your zatch, and feed you to the Todal."

"I've heard of it," said Zorn.

The Duke smiled. "You've only heard of half of it," he said. "The other half is worse. It's made of lip. It feels as if it had been dead at least a dozen days, but it moves about like monkeys and like shadows." The Prince took out his sword and put it back. "The Todal can't be killed," the Duke said, softly.

"It gleeps," said Hark.

"What's gleeping?" asked the Prince.

The Duke and Hark and Listen laughed. "Time is wasting, Prince," the Duke reminded him. "Already you have only eight and ninety hours. I wish you every strangest kind of luck." A wide

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oak door suddenly opened at the end of the room, and the Prince saw lightning and midnight and falling rain.

"One last word and warning," said the Duke. "I would not trust the Golux overfar. He cannot tell what can be from what can't. He seldom knows what should be from what is."

The Prince glanced at Hark and at the Duke, and at a spot where he thought Listen stood. "When all the clocks are striking five," he said, and left the room. The laughter of the Duke and Hark and Listen followed him out of the door and down the stairs and into the darkness. When he had gone a few steps from the castle, he looked up at a lighted window and thought he saw the Princess Saralinda standing there. A rose fell at his feet, and as he picked it up, the laughter of the Duke and Hark and Listen increased inside the black oak room and died away.

The Prince had gone but a short way from the castle when he felt a gentle finger touch his elbow. "It is the Golux," said the Golux, proudly. "The only Golux in the world."

The Prince was in no mood for the old man's gaiety and cheer. The Golux did not seem wonderful to him now, and even his indescribable hat was suddenly describable. "The Duke thinks you are not so wise as he thinks you think you are," he said.

The Golux smiled. "I think he is not so wise as he thinks I think he is," he said. "I was there. I know the terms. I had thought that only dragonflies and angels think of time, never having been an angel or a dragonfly."

"How were you there?" the Prince said in surprise.

"I am Listen," the Golux said, "or at any rate, he thinks I am. Never trust a spy you cannot see. The Duke is lamer than I am old, and I am shorter than he is cold, but it comes to you with some surprise that I am wiser than he is wise."

The Prince's courage began to return. "I think you are the most remarkable man in the world," he said.

"Who thought not so a moment since, knows not the apple from the quince," the Golux said. He scowled. "We now have only eight and ninety *hours* to find a thousand gems," he said.

"You said that you had other plans than one," the Prince reminded him.

"What plans?" the Golux asked.

"You didn't say," said Zorn.

The Golux closed his eyes and clasped his hands. "There was a treasure ship that sank, not more than forty hours from here," he said. "But, come to think of it, the Duke ransacked the ship and stole the jewels."

"So much," sighed Zorn, "for that."

The Golux thought again. "If there were hail," he said, "and we could stain the hail with blood, it might turn into rubies."

"There is no hail," said Zorn.

The Golux sighed. "So much," he said, "for that."

"The task is hard," said Zorn, "and can't be done."

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"I can do a score of things that can't be done," the Golux said. "I can find a thing I cannot see and see a thing I cannot find. The first is time, the second is a spot before my eyes.

"I can feel a thing I cannot touch and touch a thing I cannot feel. The first is sad and sorry, the second is your heart. What would you do without me? Say 'nothing.'"

"Nothing," said the Prince.

"Good. Then you're helpless and I'll help you. I said I had another plan than one, and I have just remembered what it is. There is a woman on this isle, who'd have some eight and eighty years, and she is gifted with the strangest gift of all. For when she weeps, what do you think she weeps?"

"Tears," said Zorn.

"Jewels," said the Golux.

The Prince stared at him. "But that is too remarkable to be," he said.

"I don't see why," the Golux said. "Even the lowly oyster makes his pearls without the use of eyes or hands or any tools, and pearls are jewels. The oyster is a blob of glup, but a woman is a woman."

The Prince thought of the Todal and felt a small cold feeling in his guggle. "Where does this wondrous woman dwell?" he asked.

The old man groaned. "Over mountain, over stream, by the way of storm and thunder, in a hut so high or deep—I never can remember which—the naked eye can't see it." He stood up. "We must be on our way," he said. "It will take us ninety hours, or more or less, to go and come. It's this way, or it's that way. Make up my mind."

"How can I?" asked the Prince. "You have a rose," the Golux said. "Hold it in your hand." The Prince took out the rose and held it in his hand, and its stem slowly turned and stopped. "It's this way," cried the Golux, and they started off in the direction in which the stem of the rose pointed. "I will tell you the tale of Hagga," said the Golux.

When Hagga was eleven (he began) and picking cherries in the woods one day, and asphodel, she came upon the good King Gwain of Yarrow with his foot caught in a wolf trap.

"Weep for me, maiden," said the King, "for I am ludicrous and laughable, with my foot caught in this trap. I am no longer ert, for I have lost my ertia. By twiddling my fingers or clapping my hands, I have often changed the fate of men, but now I cannot get my foot loose from this thing."

"I have no time for tears," the maiden said. She knew the secret of the trap, and was about to free the fettered foot, when a farmer from a near-by farm began to laugh. The King beshrewed him and his wife, and turned them into grasshoppers, creatures that look as if their feet are caught in traps, even when they aren't.

"Lo, the maid has freed my foot," the King exulted, seeing that she had, "but it is numb, and feels like someone else's foot, not mine." The maiden took off his shoe and rubbed his foot, until it

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felt like his and he could put it down. And for her kindness the grateful King gave her the power to weep jewels when she wept, instead of tears.

When the people learned of the strange gift the King had given Hagga, they came from leagues around, by night and day, in warm and winter weather, to make her sad and sorry. Nothing tragic happened but she heard of it and wept. People came with heavy hearts and left with pearls and rubies.

Paths were paved with pearls, and rivers ran with rubies. Children played with sapphires in the streets, and dogs chewed opals. Every peacock had at least nine diamonds in its gizzard, and one, cut open on St. Wistow's Day, had thirty-eight. The price of stones and pebbles rose, the price of gems declined, until, by making Hagga weep, you could be hanged and fined.

In the end, the jewels were melted, in a frightful fire, by order of the King. "I will make her weep myself, one day each year," the King decreed, "and thus and hence, the flow of gems will make some sense, and have some point and balance." But alas, and but alack, the maid could weep no more at any tale of tragedy or tribulation.

Damsels killed by dragons left her cold, and broken hearts, and children lost, and love denied. She never wept by day or night, in warm or winter weather. She grew to be sixteen, and twenty-six, and thirty-four, and forty-eight, and fifty-two, and now she waits, at eighty-eight, for me and you.

"I hope," the Golux said, "that this is true. I make things up, you know."

The young Prince sighed and said, "I know you do. If Hagga weeps no more, why should she weep for you?"

The Golux thought it over. "I feel that she is frail and fragile. I trust that she is sad and sorry. I hope that she is neither dead nor dying. I'll think of something very sad to tell her. *Very* sad and lonely. Take out your rose, I think we're lost."

They had become tangled in brambles by now, and the trees of the forest they had entered were tall and thick. Thorns began to tear the Prince's raiment. Lightning flashed and thunder rolled, and all paths vanished. The Prince took out the rose and held it in his hand. The stem began to turn and twist, and pointed.

"Around this way," the Golux said. "It's lighter here." He found a narrow path that led straight onward. As they walked along the path, the Golux leading, they met a Jackadandy, whose clothes were torn and tattered.

"I told my tales to Hagga," said the man; "but Hagga weeps no more. I told her tales of lovers lost in April. I told her tales of maidens dead in June. I told her tales of princes fed to geese. I even told her how I lost my youngest niece."

"This is sad," the Golux said, "and getting sadder."

"The way is long," the torn man said, "and getting longer. The road goes uphill all the way, and even farther. I wish you luck," he said. "You'll need it." He disappeared in brambles.

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The only light in the forest came from lightning, and when it flashed they watched the rose and followed where it pointed. This brought them, on the second day, into a valley. They saw a Jack-o'-lent approaching, his clothes all torn and tattered.

"I told my tales to Hagga," said the man, "but Hagga weeps no more. I told her tales of lovers lost at sea and drowned in fountains. I told her tales of babies lost in woods and lost on mountains. She wept not," said the Jack-o'-lent. "The way is dark, and getting darker. The hut is high and even higher. I wish you luck. There is none." He vanished in the briars.

The brambles and the thorns grew thick and thicker in a ticking thicket of bickering crickets. Farther along and stronger, bonged the gongs of a throng of frogs, green and vivid on their lily pads. From the sky came the crying of flies, and the pilgrims leaped over a bleating sheep creeping knee-deep in a sleepy stream, in which swift and slippery snakes slid and slithered silkily, whispering sinful secrets.

A comet whistled through the sky, and by its light they saw the hut of Hagga high on Hagga's hill. "If she is dead, there may be strangers there," the Golux said.

"How many hours have we left?" the Prince demanded.

"If we can make her weep within the hour," the Golux said, "we'll barely make it."

"I hope that she's alive and sad," said Zorn.

"I feel that she has died," the Golux sighed. "I feel it in my stomach. You better carry me. I'm weary."

Zorn of Zorna picked the Golux up and carried him.

It was cold on Hagga's hill, and fresh with furrows where the dragging points of stars had ploughed the fields. A peasant in a purple smock stalked the smoking furrows, sowing seeds. There was a smell, the Golux thought, a little like Forever in the air, but mixed with something faint and less enduring, possibly the fragrance of a flower.

"There's no light in her window," the Golux said, "and it is dark and getting darker."

"There's no smoke in her chimney," said the Prince, "and it is cold and getting colder."

The Golux barely breathed and said, "What worries me the most is that spider's web there on the door, that stretches from the hinges to the latch."

The young Prince felt a hollow feeling in his zatch. "Knock on her door," the Golux said, his voice so high that it quavered. He crossed his fingers and kept them crossed, and Zorn knocked on the door. No one answered. "Knock again," the Golux cried, and Prince Zorn knocked again.

Hagga was there. She came to the door and stared at them, a woman neither dead nor dying, and clearly only thirty-eight or thirty-nine. The Golux had missed her age by fifty years, as old men often do. "Weep for us," the Golux cried, "or else this Prince will never wed his Princess."

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"I have no tears," said Hagga. "Once I wept when ships were overdue, or brooks ran dry, or tangerines were over-ripe, or sheep got something in their eye. I weep no more," said Hagga. Her eyes were dry as deserts and her mouth seemed made of stone. "I have turned a thousand persons gemless from my door. Come in," she said. "I weep no more."

The room was dark and held a table and a chair, and in one corner something like a chest, made of oak and bound with brass. The Golux smiled and then looked sad, and said, "I have tales to make a hangman weep, and tales to bring a tear of sorrow to a monster's eye. I have tales that would disturb a dragon's sleep, and even make the Todal sigh."

At the mention of the Todal, Hagga's hair turned grey. "Once I wept when maids were married underneath the April moon. I weep no more when maids are buried, even in the month of June."

"You have the emotions of a fish," said the Golux, irritably. He sat on the floor and told her tales of the death of kings, and kindred things, and little children choked by rings.

"I have no tears," said Hagga.

He told her tales of the frogs in the forum, and the toads in the rice that destroyed the poppy-cockalorum and the cockahoopatrice.

"I weep no more," said Hagga.

"Look," the Golux said, "and listen! The Princess Saralinda will never wed this youth until the day he lays a thousand jewels upon a certain table."

"I would weep for Saralinda," Hagga sighed, "if I were able."

The Prince had wandered to the oaken chest. He seized its cover with his hand and threw it open. A radiance filled the room and lit the darkest corners. Inside the chest there were at least ten thousand jewels of the very sort and kind the Duke demanded. Diamonds flared and rubies glowed, and sapphires burned and emeralds seemed on fire.

They looked at Hagga. "These are the jewels of laughter," Hagga said. "I woke up fourteen days ago to find them on my bed. I had laughed until I wept at something in my sleep." The Golux grabbed a gleaming handful of the gems, and then another, crowing with delight.

"Put them back," said Hagga. "For there's a thing that you must know, concerning jewels of laughter. They always turn again to tears a fortnight after. It has been a fortnight, to the day and minute, since I took the pretties to this chest and put them in it."

Even as they watched, the light and colour died. The diamonds dimmed, the emeralds went out, and the jewels of Hagga's laughter turned to tears, with a little sound like sighing. There was nothing in the chest but limpid liquid, leering up at them and winking. "You must think," the Golux cried. "You must think of what you laughed at in your sleep."

Hagga's eyes were blank. "I do not know, for this was fourteen days ago."

"Think!" the Golux said.

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"*Think!*" said Zorn of Zorna.

Hagga frowned and said, "I never can remember dreams."

The Golux clasped his hands behind his back and thought it over. "As I remember and recall," he said, "the jewels of sorrow last forever. Such was the gift and power the good Gwain gave you. What was he doing, by the way, so many leagues from Yarrow?"

"Hunting," Hagga said. "Wolves, as I recall it."

The Golux scowled. "I am a man of logic, in my way. What happened on that awful day, to make him value sorrow over and above the gift of laughter? Why have these jewels turned to tears a fortnight after?"

"There was a farmer from a near-by farm, who laughed," said Hagga. "'On second thought,' the good King said, 'I will amend and modify the gift I gave you. The jewels of sorrow will last beyond all measure, but may the jewels of laughter give you little pleasure.'"

The Golux groaned. "If there's one thing in the world I hate," he said, "it is amendments." His eyes turned bright and brighter, and he clapped his hands. "I will make her laugh until she weeps," he said.

The Golux told her funny tales of things that were and had been, but Hagga's eyes were dry as quartz and her mouth seemed made of agate.

"I laugh at nothing that has been," she said, "or is." The Golux smiled. "Then we will think of things that will be, and aren't now, and never were. I'll think of something," and he thought, and thought of something.

"*A dehoy who was terribly hobble,*
Cast only stones that were cobble
And bats that were ding,
From a shot that was sling,
But never hit inks that were bobble."

Hagga laughed until she wept, and seven moonstones trickled down her cheek and clattered on the floor. "She's weeping semi-precious stones!" the Golux wailed. He tried again:

"*There was an old coddle so molly,*
He talked in a glot that was poly,
His gaws were so gew
That his laps became dew,
And he ate only pops that were lolly."

Hagga laughed until she wept, and seven brilliants trickled down her cheek and clattered on the floor. "Rhinestones!" groaned the Golux. "Now she's weeping costume jewellery!"

The young Prince tried his hand at telling tales of laughter, but for his pains he got a shower of tourmalin, a cat's-eye, and a flux of pearls. "The Duke hates pearls," the Golux moaned. "He thinks they're made by fish."

It grew darker in the room and they could scarcely see. The

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starlight and the moon were gone. They stood there, still as statues. The Golux cleared his throat. The Prince uncrossed his arms and crossed them. And then, without a rhyme or reason, out of time and out of season, Hagga laughed and kept on laughing.

No one had said a word, no one had told a tale. It might have been the hooting of an owl. It might have been the crawling of a snail. But Hagga laughed and kept on laughing, and precious jewels twinkled down her cheek and sparkled on the floor, until the hut was ankle-deep in diamonds and in rubies.

The Golux counted out a thousand and put them in a velvet sack that he had brought along. "I wish that she had laughed," he sighed, "at something I had said."

Zorn of Zorna took her hand. "God keep you warm in winter," said the Prince, "and cool in summer."

"Farewell," the Golux said, "and thank you."

Hagga laughed and kept on laughing, and sapphires burned upon the floor and lit the Golux towards the door.

"How many hours are left us now?" the young Prince cried. "It's odd," the Golux muttered to himself. "I could have sworn that she had died. This is the only time my stomach ever lied."

"How many hours are left us now?" the Prince implored.

Hagga sat upon the chest and kept on laughing.

"I should say," the Golux said, "that we have only forty left, but it is downhill all the way."

They went out into the moonless night and peered about them in the dark.

"I think it's this way," the Golux said, and they went the way he thought it was.

"What about the clocks?" demanded Zorn.

The Golux exhaled a sorry breath. "That's another problem for another hour," he said.

Inside the hut, something red and larger than a ruby glowed among the jewels and Hagga picked it up.

"A rose," she said. "They must have dropped it."

In the black oak room the yellow torches flared and crackled on the walls, and their fire burned on the lances and the shields. The Duke's gloves glittered. "How goes the night?" he gnarled.

"The moon is down," said Hark. "I have not heard the clocks."

"You'll never hear them!" screamed the Duke. "I slew time in this castle many a cold and snowy year ago."

Hark stared at him emptily and seemed to be chewing something. "Time froze here. Someone left the windows open."

"Bah!" The Duke sat down at the far end of the table, stood up again, and limped about. "It bled hours and minutes on the floor. I saw it with my eye." Hark kept on chewing something. Outside the Gothic windows thunder growled. An owl flew by.

"There are no jewels," roared the Duke. "They'll have to bring me pebbles from the sea or mica from the meadows." He gave his awful laugh. "How goes the night?" he asked again.

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"I have been counting off and on," said Hark, "and I should say they have some forty minutes left."

"They'll never make it!" the cold Duke screamed. "I hope they drowned, or broke their legs, or lost their way." He came so close to Hark their noses almost touched. "Where were they going?" he whispered harshly.

Hark stepped backward seven steps. "I met a Jackadandy, some seven hours ago," he said. "They passed him on their way to Hagga's hill. Do you remember Hagga, and have you thought of her?"

The Duke's loud laughter rang the shields.

"Hagga weeps no more," he said. "Hagga has no tears. She did not even weep when she was told about the children locked up in my tower."

"I hated that," said Hark.

"I liked it," said the Duke. "No child can sleep in my camellias." He began to limp again and stared out at the night. "Where is Listen?" he demanded.

"He followed them," said Hark, "the Golux and the Prince."

"I do not trust him," growled the Duke. "I like a spy that I can see. Let me have men about me that are visible." He shouted "Listen!" up the stairs, and "Listen!" out of the windows, but no one answered. "I'm cold," he rasped.

"You always are."

"I'm colder," snarled the Duke, "and never tell me what I always am!" He took his sword out and slashed at nothing and at silence. "I miss Whisper."

"You fed him to the geese," said Hark. "They seemed to like him."

"Silence! What was that?"

"What did it sound like?"

"Like princes stealing up the stairs, like Saralinda leaving." The Duke limped to the iron stairs and slashed again at silence and at nothing. "What does he feel like? Have you felt him?"

"Listen? He's five feet high," said Hark. "He has a beard, and something on his head I can't describe."

"The Golux!" shrieked the Duke. "You felt the Golux! I hired him as a spy and didn't know it."

A purple ball with gold stars on it came slowly bouncing down the iron stairs and winked and twinkled, like a naked child saluting priests. "What insolence is this?" the Duke demanded. "What *is* that thing?"

"A ball," said Hark.

"I know that!" screamed the Duke. "But why? What does its ghastly presence signify?"

"It looks to me," said Hark, "very like a ball the Golux and those children used to play with."

"They're on his side!" The Duke was apoplectic. "Their ghosts are on his side."

"He has a lot of friends," said Hark.

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"Silence!" roared the Duke. "He knows not what is dead from what is dying, or where he's been from where he's going, or striking clocks from clocks that never strike."

"What makes me think he does?" The spy stopped chewing. Something very much like nothing anyone had seen before came trotting down the stairs and crossed the room.

"What is that?" the Duke asked, palely.

"I don't know what it is," said Hark, "but it's the only one there ever was."

The Duke's gloved hands shook and shimmered. "I'll throw them up for grabs betwixt the Todal and the geese! I'll lock them in the dungeon with the thing without a head!" At the mention of the Todal, Hark's velvet mask turned grey. The Duke's eye twisted upward in its socket. "I'll slay them all!" he said. "This sweetheart and her suitor, this cross-eyed clown! You hear me?"

"Yes," said Hark, "but there are rules and rites and rituals, older than the sound of bells and snow on mountains."

"Go on," the Duke said, softly, looking up the stairs.

"You must let them have their time and turn to make the castle clocks strike five."

"The castle clocks were murdered," said the Duke. "I killed time here myself one snowy morning. You still can see the old brown stains, where seconds bled to death, here on my sleeve." He laughed. "What else?" he asked.

"You know as well as I," said Hark. "The Prince must have his turn and time to lay a thousand jewels there on the table."

"And if he does?"

"He wins the hand of Princess Saralinda."

"The only warm hand in the castle," said the Duke. "Who loses Saralinda loses fire. I mean the fire of the setting suns, and not the cold and cheerless flame of jewels. Her eyes are candles burning in a shrine. Her feet appear to me as doves. Her fingers bloom upon her breast like flowers."

"This is scarcely the way," said Hark, "to speak of one's own niece."

"She's not my niece! I stole her!" cried the Duke. "I stole her from the castle of a king! I snatched her from the bosom of a sleeping queen. I still bear on my hands the marks of where she bit me."

"The Queen?" asked Hark.

"The Princess," roared the Duke.

"Who was the King?" asked Hark.

His master scowled. "I never knew," he said. "My ship was beached upon an island in a storm. There was no moon or any star. No lights were in the castle."

"How could you find the Princess then?" asked Hark.

"She had a radiance," said the Duke. "She shone there like a star upon her mother's breast. I knew I had to have that splendour in my castle. I mean to keep her here till she is twenty-one. The day she is, I'll wed her, and that day is tomorrow."

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"Why haven't you before?" asked Hark. "This castle is your kingdom."

The Duke smiled and showed his upper teeth. "Because her nurse turned out to be a witch who cast a spell upon me."

"What were its terms?" asked Hark.

"I cannot wed her till the day she's twenty-one, and that day is tomorrow."

"You said that once before."

"I must keep her in a chamber where she is safe from me. I've done that."

"I like that part," said Hark.

"I hate it," snarled the Duke. "I must give and grant the right to any prince to seek her hand in marriage. I've done that, too." He sat down at the table.

"In spells of this sort," Hark said, chewing, "one always finds a chink or loophole, by means of which the right and perfect prince can win her hand in spite of any task you set him. How did the witch announce that part of it?"

"Like this. 'She can be saved, and you destroyed, only by a prince whose name begins with X and doesn't.' There is no prince whose name begins with X and doesn't."

Hark's mask slipped off and he put it back again, but not before the Duke saw laughter in his eyes.

"This prince," said Hark, "is Zorn of Zorna, but to your terror and distaste, he once posed as a minstrel. His name was Xingu then and wasn't. This is the prince whose name begins with X and doesn't."

The Duke's sword had begun to shake. "Nobody ever tells me anything," he whispered to himself.

Another ball came bouncing down the stairs, a black ball stamped with scarlet owls. The cold Duke watched it roll across the floor. "What impudence is this?" he cried.

Hark walked to the stairs and listened, and turned and said, "There's someone up there."

"It's the children!" croaked the Duke.

"The children are dead," said Hark, "and the sound I heard was made by living feet."

"How much time is left them?" cried the Duke.

"Half an hour, I think," said Hark.

"I'll have their guggles on my sword for playing games with me!" The Duke started up the stairs and stopped. "They're up there, all of them. Call out the guards," he barked.

"The guards are guarding the clocks," said Hark. "You wanted it that way. There are eleven guards, and each one guards a clock. You and I are guarding *these*." He pointed at the two clocks on the walls. "You wanted it that way."

"Call out the guards," the Duke repeated, and his agent called the guards. They trooped into the room like engines. The Duke limped up the stairs, his drawn sword shining. "Follow me!" he cried. "Another game's afoot! I'll slay the Golux and the

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Prince, and marry Saralinda!". He led the way. The guards ramped up the stairs like engines. Hark smiled, and chewed again, and followed.

The black oak room was silent for a space of seven seconds. Then a secret door swung open in a wall. The Golux slipped into the room. The Princess followed. His hands were raw and red from climbing vines to Saralinda's chamber. "How could you find the castle in the dark without my rose?" she asked. "He would not let me burn a torch."

"You lighted up your window like a star, and we could see the castle from afar," the Golux said. "Our time is marked in minutes. Start the clocks!"

"I cannot start the clocks," the Princess said.

They heard the sound of fighting far above. "He faces thirteen men," she cried, "and that is hard."

"We face thirteen clocks," the Golux said, "and that is harder. Start the clocks!"

"How can I start the clocks?" the Princess wailed.

"Your hand is warmer than the snow is cold," the Golux said. "Touch the first clock with your hand." The Princess touched it. Nothing happened. "Again!" Saralinda held her hand against the clock and nothing happened. "We are ruined," said the Golux simply, and Saralinda's heart stood still.

She cried, "Use magic!"

"I have no magic to depend on," groaned the Golux. "Try the other clock."

The Princess tried the other clock and nothing happened. "Use logic, then!" she cried. In the secret walls they heard the Iron Guard pounding after Zorn, and coming close.

"Now let me see," the Golux said. "If you can touch the clocks and never start them, then you can start the clocks and never touch them. That's logic, as I know and use it. Hold your hand this far away. Now that far. Closer! Now a little farther back. A little farther. There! I think you have it! Do not move!"

The clogged and rigid works of the clock began to whir. They heard a tick and then a ticking. The Princess Saralinda fled from room to room, like wind in clover, and held her hand the proper distance from the clocks. Something like a vulture spread its wings and left the castle. "That was Then," the Golux said.

"It's Now!" cried Saralinda.

A morning glory that had never opened, opened in the courtyard. A cock that never crowed, began to crow. The light of morning stained the windows, and in the walls the cold Duke moaned, "I hear the sound of time. And yet I slew it, and wiped my bloody sword upon its beard." He thought that Zorn of Zorna had escaped the guards. His sword kept whining in the blackness, and once he slashed his own left knee—he thought it was the Golux. "Come out, you crooning knave!" he cried. "Stand forward, Zorn of Zorna!"

"He's not here," said the spy.

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They heard the savage clash of swords. "They've got him!" squealed the Duke. "Eleven men to one!"

"You may have heard of Galahad," said Hark, "whose strength was as the strength of ten."

"That leaves one man to get him," cried the Duke. "I count on Krang, the strongest guard I have, the finest fencer in the world, save one. An unknown prince in armour vanquished him a year ago, somewhere on an island. No one else can do it."

"The unknown prince," said Hark, "was Zorn of Zorna."

"I'll slay him then myself!" The Duke's voice rose and echoed down the dark and secret stairs. "I slew time with the bloody hand that grips your arm, and time is greater far than Zorn of Zorna!"

Hark began to chew again. "No mortal man can murder time," he said, "and even if he could, there's something else: a clockwork in a maiden's heart, that strikes the hours of youth and love, and knows the southward swan from winter snow, and summer afternoons from tulip time."

"You sicken me with your chocolate chatter," snarled the Duke. "Your tongue is made of candy. I'll slay this ragged prince, if Krang has missed him. If there were light, I'd show you on my sleeves the old brown stains of seconds, where they bled and died. I slew time in these gloomy halls, and wiped my bloody blade—"

"Oh, shut up," said Hark. "You are the most aggressive villain in the world. I always meant to tell you that. I said it and I'm glad."

"Silence," roared the Duke. "Where are we?" They stumbled down the secret stairs.

"This is the hidden door," said Hark, "that leads into the oak room."

"Open," roared the Duke, his sword gripped in his hand. Hark groped and found the secret knob.

The black oak room was bright with flaming torches, but brighter with the light of Saralinda. The cold eye of the Duke was dazzled by the gleaming of a thousand jewels that sparkled on the table. His ears were filled with chiming as the clocks began to strike.

"One!" said Hark.

"Two!" cried Zorn of Zorna.

"Three!" the Duke's voice almost whispered.

"Four!" sighed Saralinda.

"Five!" the Golux crowed, and pointed at the table. "The task is done, the terms are met," he said.

The Duke's cold eye slowly moved around the room. "Where are my guards?" he croaked. "And where is Krang, the greatest of them all?"

"I lured them to the tower," said Zorn, "and locked them in. The one that's tied in knots is Krang."

The Duke glared at the jewels on the table. "They're false!" he said. "They must be coloured pebbles!" He picked one up, and saw that it was real, and put it down again.

"The task is done," said Hark, "the terms are met."

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"Not until I count them," said the Duke. "If there be only one that isn't here, I wed the Princess Saralinda on the morrow." The figures in the room were still and he could hear their breathing.

"What a gruesome way to treat one's niece," the Golux cried.

"She's not my niece," the lame man sneered. "I stole her from a king." He showed his lower teeth. "We all have flaws," he said, "and mine is being wicked." He sat down at the table and began to count the gems.

"Who is my father then?" the Princess cried.

The spy's black eyebrows rose. "I thought the Golux told you, but then, of course, he never could remember things."

"Especially," the Golux said, "the names of kings."

"Your father," said the spy, "is good King Gwain of Yarrow."

"I knew that once," the Golux said, "but I forgot it." He turned to Saralinda. "Then the gift your father gave to Hagga has operated in the end to make you happy."

The Duke looked up and bared his teeth. "The tale is much too tidy for my taste," he snarled. "I hate it."

He went on counting.

"It's neat," said Hark, "and, to *my* taste, refreshing." He removed his mask. His eyes were bright and jolly. "If I may introduce myself," he said, "I am a servant of the King, the good King Gwain of Yarrow."

"That," the Golux said, "I didn't know. You could have saved the Princess many years ago."

The servant of the King looked sad, and said, "This part I always hate to tell, but I was under a witch's spell."

"I weary of witches," the Golux said, "with due respect to Mother."

The Duke's smile showed his upper teeth. "I cannot even trust the spies I see," he muttered. His eye moved glassily around and saw the Golux. "You mere Device!" he snarled. "You platitude! You Golux *ex machina!*"

"Quiet, please," the Golux said, "you gleaming thief."

"Nine hundred ninety-eight." The Duke was counting. "Nine hundred ninety-nine." He had counted all the jewels, and put them in a sack. There was none left on the table. He gave them all a look of horrid glee.

"The Princess," said the Duke, "belongs to me."

A deathly silence filled the room. The Golux turned a little pale and his hand began to shake. He remembered something in the dark, coming down from Hagga's hill, that struck against his ankle, a sapphire or a ruby that had fallen from the sack. "One thousand," groaned the Duke, in a tone of vast surprise. A diamond had fallen from his glove, the left one, and no one but the Golux saw it fall.

The Duke stood up and sneered. "What are you waiting for?" he shrieked. "Depart! If you be gone forever, it will not be long enough! If you return no more, then it will be too soon!" He slowly turned to Zorn. "What kind of knots?" he snarled.

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"Turk's head," the young Prince said. "I learned them from my sister."

"Begone!" the cold Duke screamed again, and bathed his hands in rubies. "My jewels," he croaked, "will last forever." The Golux, who had never tittered, tittered. The great doors of the oak room opened, and they left the cold Duke standing there, up to his wrists in diamonds.

"Yarrow," said the Prince, "is half-way on our journey." They stood outside the castle.

"You'll need these," said the Golux. He held the reins of two white horses. "Your ship lies in the harbour. It sails within the hour."

"It sails at midnight," Hark corrected him.

"I can't remember everything," the Golux said. "My father's clocks were always slow. He also lacked the power of concentration."

Zorn helped the Princess to her saddle. She gazed a last time at the castle.

"A fair wind stands for Yarrow," said the Prince.

The Golux gazed a last time at the Princess. "Keep warm," he said. "Ride close together. Remember laughter. You'll need it even in the blessed isles of Ever After."

"There are no horses in the stables," mused the Prince. "Whence came these white ones?"

"The Golux has a lot of friends," said Hark. "I expect they give him horses when he needs them. But on the other hand, he may have made them up. He makes things up you know."

"I know he does," sighed Zorn of Zorna. "You sail for Yarrow with us?"

"I must stay a fortnight longer," Hark replied. "So runs my witch's spell. It will give me time to tidy up, and untie Krang as well."

They looked around for the old Device, but he was there no longer.

"Where has he gone?" cried Saralinda.

"Oh," said Hark, "he knows a lot of places."

"Give him," Saralinda said, "my love, and this." Hark took the rose.

The two white horses snorted snowy mist in the cool green glade that led down to the harbour. A fair wind stood for Yarrow and, looking far to sea, the Princess Saralinda thought she saw, as people often think they see, on clear and windless days, the distant shining shores of Ever After. Your guess is quite as good as mine (there are a lot of things that shine) but I have always thought she did, and I will always think so.

A fortnight later, the Duke was gloating over his jewels in the oak room when they suddenly turned to tears, with a little sound like sighing. The fringes of his glowing gloves were stained with Hagga's laughter. He staggered to his feet and drew his sword, and shouted, "Whisper!"

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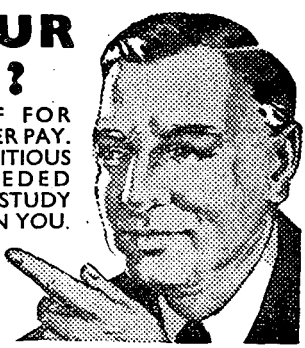

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In the courtyard of the castle six startled geese stopped hunting snails and looked up at the oak room.

"What slish is this?" exclaimed the Duke, disgusted by the pool of melted gems leering on the table. His monocle fell, and he slashed his sword at silence and at nothing. Something moved across the room, like monkeys and like shadows.

The torches on the walls went out, the two clocks stopped, and the room grew colder. There was a smell of old, unopened rooms and the sound of rabbits screaming.

"Come on, you blob of glup," the cold Duke roared. "You may frighten octopi to death, you gibbous spawn of hate and thunder, but not the Duke of Coffin Castle!" He sneered. "Now that my precious gems have turned to thlup, living on, alone and cold, is not my fondest wish! On guard, you musty sofa!"

The Todal gleeped.

There was a stifled shriek and silence.

When Hark came into the room, holding a lighted lantern above his head, there was no one there. The Duke's sword lay gleaming on the floor, and from the table dripped the jewels of Hagga's laughter, that never last forever, like the jewels of sorrow, but turn again to tears a fortnight after. Hark stepped on something that squutched beneath his foot and flobbed against the wall. He picked it up and held it near the lantern. It was the small black ball stamped with scarlet owls.

The last spy of the Duke of Coffin Castle, alone and lonely in the gloomy room, thought he heard, from somewhere far away, the sound of someone laughing.

★ ***Mrs. Peele, witty and affluent, smiled back at the adoring young man. A dry demon of irony possessed her as she heard him ingenuously praising the new guest—that wealthy professional philanthropist, once her husband! ALDOUS HUXLEY pursues to the full the irony of love in his provocative new story "Time's Revenges," in next month's ARGOSY, on sale January 9th.***

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 5, Madder. 8, Monogamy. 9, Lackey. 10, Chit-chat. 11, Remiss. 12, Informer. 15, Genie. 16, Yearling. 19, Hatching. 24, Steep. 27, Literary. 28, Gossip. 29, Charming. 30, Minute. 31, Entitled. 32, Recess.

Down: 1, Nothing. 2, Portion. 3, Way home. 4, Mystery. 5, Malaria. 6, Decimal. 7, Emerson. 13, Feet. 14, Rich. 17, Rite. 18, Idea. 20, Aconite. 21, Costume. 22, Impress. 23, Glacier. 24, Straits. 25, Eremite. 26, Printer.

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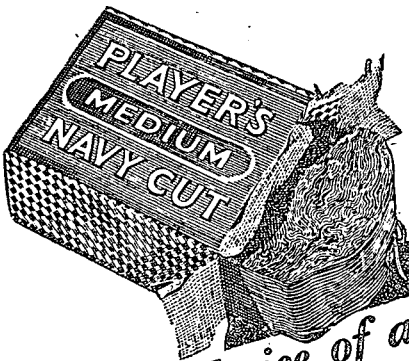

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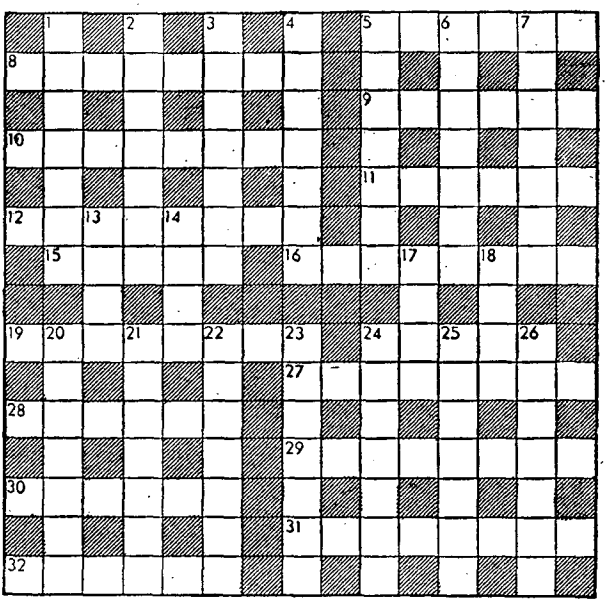
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 142



CLUES

Across

5 Rose when red is more annoyed (6).

8 It's agony, Mom, this state (8).

9 Cash and the means of opening a safe — what more could a servant want? (6).

10 Conversational addition to a report makes it none the less trivial (4-4).

11 Careléss. With regard to a young lady? (6).

12 He sounds like one who is in fine fettle—though he's rather an unpleasant character (8).

15 This spirit is safer left in the bottle (5).

16 A young animal found in twelve months' heather (8).

19 A method of engraving eggs, perhaps (8).

24 One in five is this on the road (5).

27 Leacock's lapses were of this kind! (8).

28 "For pines are —— pines the wide world through" (James Elroy Flecker) (6).

29 This lady and porcelain go surprisingly well together (8).

30 A little hand to watch (6).

31 After all, one is due for a peerage in the end (8).

32 Leave in a nice secluded corner (6).

Down

1 "The Stars are Setting and the Caravan Starts for the Dawn of——" (Fitzgerald) (7).

2 This element added to a glass of Old Tawny, for example, comprises a good share (7).

3 Hew Mayo in pieces to find the road back (3, 4).

4 But this kind of play is not necessarily a thriller (7).

5 The worst part of the "Fleurs du Mal" followed by song produces fever (7).

6 This system has certainly got its points (7).

7 Eros confused among men becomes a philosopher (7).

13 Poetry moves along on these (4).

14 "—— not gaudy" as Polonius said about 21 down (4).

17 Correct-sounding ceremony (4).

18 Fifty from perfection leaves a mere thought (4).

20 Poison implanted in clerical headgear—and especially lethal to the wolf (7).

21 The emu turns tail at the price—from habit no doubt (7).

22 I'm at the head of a throng and make my mark (7).

23 Girl ace lost in the snow (7).

24 In difficulties near Dover (7).

25 "And watching, with eternal lids apart, Like nature's patient, sleepless ——" (Keats) (7).

26 Caxton was the first here (7).

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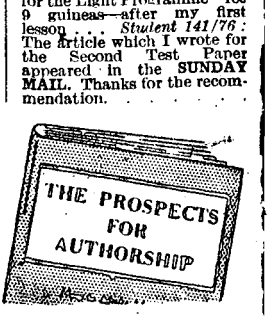

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